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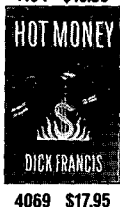
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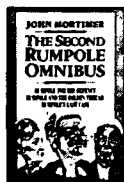
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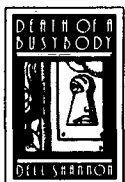
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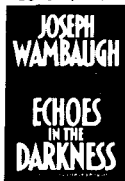
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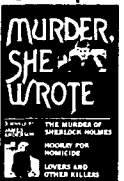
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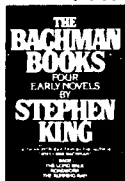
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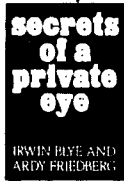
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

About the time this issue goes on sale on newsstands, Bouchercon XIX will be taking place in San Diego. There the winners of the 1987 Shamus awards, given by the Private Eye Writers of America, will be announced.

Nominated for Best Short Story of 1987, among others, are two of our own: "Merely Players" by Joseph Hansen, which appeared in our February 1987 issue, and "My Brother's Life" by Rob Kantner, from the March issue. Also nominated, by the way, for Best Novel, are two writers whose stories have often appeared in AHMM: Loren D. Estleman for *Lady Yesterday* and John Lutz for *Ride the Lightning*. The latter was expanded into novel length from Lutz's Edgar-winning short story of the same ti-

tle, originally published in the January 1985 issue of AHMM. Congratulations, gentlemen!

And speaking of such matters, we thought you'd enjoy the following. The prize for The Story That Won this time (see page 139) was taken by Art Cosing, but we had some excellent runners-up and among them was this entry, titled "The Goblin House":

This is a scary house.
It's like a ware house.
It's like a brok house.
The chiminey is small.
Black birds come by this house.

It's a dark house.
We were charmed with it—and impressed. The author, Marie Ingrisano of Floral Park, New York, is six years old and in the first grade.

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FICTION

The [REDACTED] Innocents

by Jas. R. Petrin



Illustration by Kurt Wallace

“Who killed him?
I wish I knew,”
Joe says.

At least he tells me that's his name—Joe. The tattoo on his hand reads Danny, but I'm not going to argue. There isn't much point. We're in transit together, two cons heading for the airport, him to fly one way over the clouds, and me another, changing prisons. A sad thing too, seeing as how we're both innocent.

We've got maybe ten minutes or so before the van makes the airport. He's a thin man with acne scars and a pencil-line mustache, and he talks fast, knitting his story together with the quick tight words you expect from someone who's been ten years in the pen.

“That night we're driving a car that Petey—the guy I'm with—has lifted somewhere. We shouldn't even have stopped at that all-night grocery. I don't want to stop. Petey does. He's thirsty for one of those big drinks they sell with the crushed ice in them. Me, I want to keep rolling. I've got a feeling that place will turn out bad for us. I can sometimes tell things like that in advance, you know?”

“So anyways, in we go. Petey plunks his money down. The clerk is a shrimp of a guy, not the type to be in charge of an all-night grocery off Main

Street. Petey's eyes go sort of funny when he sees him, like a big dog spotting a cat, and I know right away he isn't going to settle for no crushed-ice drink, that my gut feelings were right at the start. I think the kid feels it too, I see it in his eyes—bad news in the air, all right. He's ringing up Petey's drink when Petey just leans over casual-like and plops his big mitt into the till.”

The van chirps around a corner, swaying, and I nod. I know what Joe means, I've had pre-sentiments like that too in my time. I cast my own mind back ten years. It isn't an all-night grocery for me, but a jewelry store. And something that night has told me to turn around and go home. But I pay no attention. That's my mistake.

“Things go sour fast then, know what I mean?” Joe says. “Boom! Out of control. The kid leaps back, slamming the till drawer hard on Petey's hand. Petey squeals like a slapped dog, brings his other hand around fast and yanks away a three foot hunk of hockey stick that the kid has fished out, and gives the kid a slap with it. The kid drops like a wet sock. I mean, that Petey—what a jerk. I don't know who's stupider, him or the kid. But here we are in a floodlit store with a bleeding guy slumped behind the till

and a hot car outside. My head is reeling. It's crazy how things happen sometimes."

I'm listening to Joe. He is so right.

With me it begins with the crazy jeweler following me out to the lane. I don't know he's there till he lays his hand on my shoulder between the parked cars and spins me around. "You robbed me!" he squawks. But I hadn't even got past the door of his shop when the inside alarm scared me off. I try to push past him, then I just about faint when I see the revolver in the old guy's hand. We scuffle, there's a sharp snap! and then he's slumping against one of the cars and sort of gurgling and staring at me with his mouth open. I glance around, panicking, and damned if I don't spot a patrol car half a block away drifting slowly towards me up the lane. Without even thinking I yank open the back door of the car I'm hanging onto, shove the old man inside, and slam it quick.

Joe is jabbering on.

"So what do I do with Petey? He's just standing there with an idiot look on his face, like a kid waiting to have his nose wiped. I felt like that guy in the story we read at school—you know, the one who's traveling in the depression with this big dope who pats the girl on the

head and kills her. I can't risk going out the front in case we meet someone coming in, so I take him quick by the elbow and walk him out the back, hitting the panic bar on the loading door and moving us through it fast."

At least you had company, Joe, I'm thinking.

It was a little different with me. I was alone. That patrol car has scared hell out of me. I'm crazy to get away, but I can't risk going straight to my car in case the cops spot me and make a note of it. I know I've got to stall, give them a chance to move off. And I can't be seen lurking in the back lane, either. So I head nonchalantly through this parking lot out to the front street trying to behave like Mr. Citizen, my legs feeling like two coil springs with lead weights attached. And what do I see as I come around the corner of the building? That's right, those same damn cops, just pulling into the curb and getting out of their car. I shriek at myself not to panic, tell myself they can't possibly know about the jeweler. I pretend I don't see them. I'm Mr. Citizen out for a stroll. I got rights. There's a lit up doorway on my left, and in I go, sweating.

The van slows down. It gives a jounce. I can hear the deep scream of jet engines. We're al-

most there, and Joe talks faster.

"I get Petey into the car, and we take off. Boy, do I heave a sigh of relief. In a few seconds we're rolling fast up the ramp to the thoroughway and I've got Petey fumbling through his pockets to find change for the toll."

The van stops. The engine quits. We feel the guards getting out of the cab, the shift of the chassis relieved of their weight; we hear the separate solid *chunks* of the heavy front doors slamming shut.

"There at the toll gate is where it all goes bad," Joe says. He's already up on his feet. "Petey can't come up with the toll, he's got no coins at all, he's left them on the counter at the all-night grocery. I curse, but we have to pull over to the attendant's cage to break a twenty. And that turns out to be a really wrong turn . . ."

You made a wrong turn, I

think to myself. I'm remembering that bright little store, a harsh blaze of lights. All empty aisles and *no clerk*. How I creep ahead gaping, stumble on something, and stupidly reach down and pick up a hunk of hockey stick . . .

The big side doors of the van fly back to let the midnight stink of the airport flood in, uniformed arms come reaching in at us.

"And the toll attendant's eyes go big as ashtrays," Joe says as a hand takes his wrist. "I turn to see what he's goggling at, *and there's this stiff sprawling in the back seat of our car!*"

The uniforms have us both out on the tarmac now and they're marching Joe away. He turns and hollers over the airplane thunder, "So me and Petey get sent up for killing a *jeweler—and we were innocent!*"

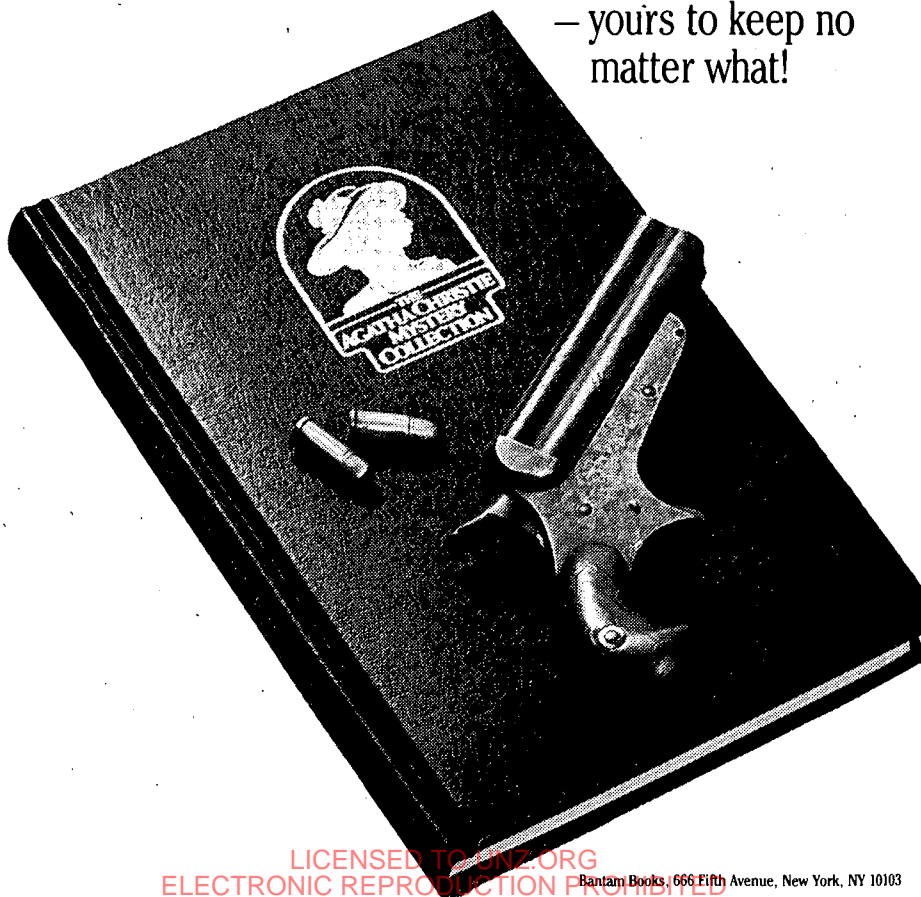
And I never killed their clerk.

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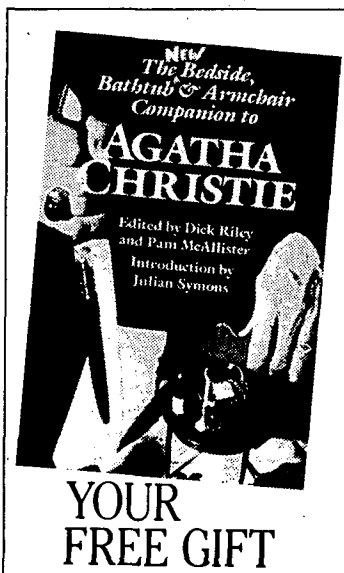
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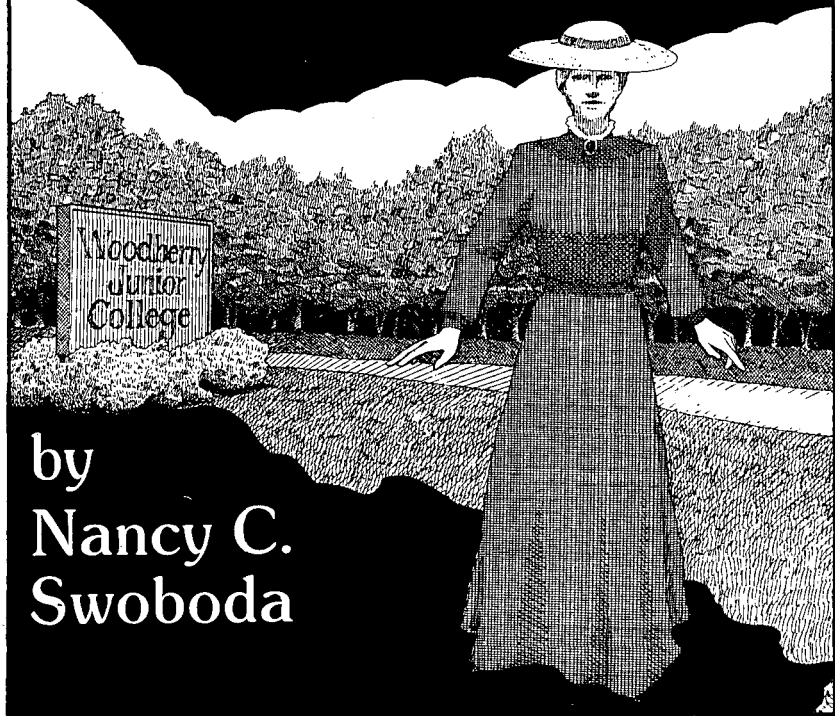
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FICTION

Winnie's Ghost



by
Nancy C.
Swoboda

Woodberry is a private junior college for girls and has been my home now for four years. My name is Melva, and me and my little girl Francie really fell into a pot of jam when I landed a job here. You see, my old man walked out on us and my only talents were cleaning, cooking,

and gardening. All of them things was just what they wanted from someone to run The Cabin.

The campus is acres of pretty grounds and woods and The Cabin is a nice walk through the trees and sets by a little pond. The girls come down for my burgers and pastries and

Illustration by Patrick Welsh

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such when they want a break from the regular stuff, or bring their dates and dance to the jukebox. It's a real log cabin with living space at the back and I even have a garden.

You'd be surprised at what you find out just by keeping your ears open. Every year's different what with new students arriving, but I get to know most of the girls pretty well and every one of 'em has a story. I came to see one thing, though. Even if the faces change, the same problems stay, the same types seem to find each other and form little groups. It doesn't take long to spot the leaders, the loners, and the troublemakers.

I don't mean to sound like a wise old owl. Lois Nolan is sort of my Hedda Hopper. She's the head of housekeeping, and speaking of birds, she's like a little wren with them beady black eyes and the way she flits around with her feather duster. Nobody pays any attention to her but she hears about as much as them hundred-year-old walls in the buildings up there have listened to, but they keep quiet.

Lois and I get together over a cup of my herb tea plenty of times, and when the girls come down to The Cabin it just plain makes it interesting for me to know about them and see what

happens. They relax at my place and I like to think that the little talks I've had with them have helped in some way. When you're away from home for the first time, it's maybe kind of scary to find out who you really are.

And scary is what last semester was. It was first term in the fall and I found myself right in the middle of some ghostly goings-on that made us all as jumpy as a grasshopper on a hot sidewalk. Some things we're not meant to know, can't figure out, but when there's a wrong to be righted, that's a different story.

Like always, the new junior girls started showing up looking lost and hauling everything from footlockers to teddy bears. We had a couple of new faces in the faculty department, too. There was the history professor, Walter Lange. He reminded me of Adolph Hitler in horn-rimmed glasses. And there was a new member in the athletic department by the name of Laura Bates.

She was pretty, blonde, and slender and sort of aristocratic looking. Her job would be teaching tennis, fencing, archery, and golf. Outside of the students she was the youngest thing on campus. I wondered at the time how long she'd last around a faculty that smelled

of violet water and Ben-Gay.

My usual routine at The Cabin turned into a little unexpected vacation right about then. My grill needed replacing and some of the plumbing went bad, so the trustees decided to have the whole place gone over before winter came blowing in through the trees.

Francie and I bunked in with Lois. She has a nice little suite in one wing with plenty of room. Francie went to kindergarten then, so I had lots of time to float around and get a first-hand idea of life at the college.

I took myself on a tour and decided old Winifred West had quite a taste for the finer things in life, along with a good education. Aside from the tennis courts, riding ring, and stables, there was a big indoor swimming pool, a library, music rooms, and art studios.

The rooms were all big with deep closets, sinks, and them tall windows to let in plenty of fresh air and light. Each floor and wing had a bathroom with showers, toilets, and tubs, everything nice and private and done in white tile. There was lots of oak paneling, long carpeted halls, and high ceilings.

Winifred West had founded the college over a hundred years ago, and from what I'd heard, it had always been respected for the discipline and quality education she'd insisted be carried

on. I liked to think that maybe one day I could send Francie here.

It took me a couple of days to get used to them bells. On weekdays all the girls had to be in their rooms at ten o'clock so's the senior hall proctor could count noses and report to the faculty counselor on that floor. Then, of course, they could go back down to the lounge for a soda or whatever. The bell also went off at seven in the morning to get everyone up in time for breakfast and classes.

Lois forgot to warn me that first night, and I was reading one of my crime books when the ten o'clock bells went off. I thought the place was on fire. That's another thing they're real strict about. Being so old, the place would catch on fire like tinder, so the lounge, the girls call it the Smoke House, is the only place cigarettes are allowed. And you can bet there's someone there to keep an eye on observing the rules.

That leads me into mentioning Willard Potts. Now you'd think any man who's the only one allowed to live in a building full of nice young ladies would be all smiles, but not him. His quarters are near the Smoke House in the basement, and he's the maintenance engineer, which means he keeps the boilers going, makes general repairs, and replaces lightbulbs.

But he acts like this whole place belongs to him, and you can see him flinch if any of the girls puts even a scuff in the wax job he does on the floors.

"Watchful Willy," "Weird Willard," or "Potsy" is what he gets called because he's always skulking around trying to keep the girls from being careless. He kind of reminds me of a younger Boris Karloff, and dressed in them dark gray work clothes he seems sort of invisible, that is until he jumps out to scold somebody.

The male faculty members and the female married ones live in a nice little row of salt-boxes up at one end of the campus. Laura Bates being young and single was assigned to a suite like Lois Nolan's on the second floor just below. I watched her out the window unpacking her sporty yellow car and heard the clinkity-clank of the old cage elevator hauling her and her stuff on up.

Everybody was settled in by the end of that first week, not getting lost any more and going to classes. You could sort of feel a rhythm developing and the girls relaxing now that they knew what to expect.

A rainy spell spoiled our usually pretty fall. Washed all them red and gold leaves right off the branches and it turned cold and dreary. Laura Bates had to cancel some of her outdoor classes

and took to sitting in as a fourth for bridge with some of the girls in the Smoke House during their free periods. She was real popular but I could tell she was trying hard to keep a student/teacher relationship, not play favorites.

There was one I could see was giving her a hard time doing that. Her name was Whitney Ross. She was a fragile little thing, blonde with big blue eyes, and she had fastened onto Laura Bates like flypaper. It was plain that Laura didn't quite know how to handle it.

Now, if I'd been behind my counter at The Cabin it would have been real easy to talk to Laura or maybe even Whitney over a bowl of chili, a piece of pie, to find out what was going on. Being in the main building, I sure didn't have an excuse to butt in and strike up a heart to heart chat with either one of them girls.

It didn't surprise me, when I mentioned it to Lois, that she knew more than I did about the situation.

"It's not what you call a crush." Lois cocked her head to one side. "That poor little Whitney Ross lost both her parents in an auto accident, and Laura Bates reminds her of her mother."

"I wonder if Laura knows that. Hmm. It might help if she did, maybe Whitney, too."

"You're like a fish out of water up here, Melva. Why don't you go take a magazine and sit in the Smoke House? You just might get a chance to talk to both of them," she winked.

That's just what I did. On the way I saw Willard shaking his finger at two girls who'd tracked in mud on the front hall carpeting. His face was as red as a tomato. The Smoke House was almost empty, so I sat myself down near the door and read my magazine with one eye. I nailed Laura first. When she walked in, I motioned her over to the couch where I was sitting.

"Hi. My name's Melva. I run The Cabin and I just wanted to introduce myself."

She seemed pleasant enough and sat down. We made small talk and then I jumped in.

"Couldn't help notice that Whitney Ross admires you. I suppose that happens with some students toward their teachers."

Laura made a face and then eyed me hopefully. "Any suggestions on how to get her out of my hair? She's like a shadow, and I don't enjoy it one bit."

"I have an idea why she's so attached to you. Whitney lost her folks in a car crash and you look like her mother."

Laura's eyes went wide and

then narrowed as she shook her head. "That's very sad, but I can't have her following me around like a lost puppy."

"Maybe you should have a good talk with her, set aside certain times that she can be with you. Might help her get over things."

She stood up. "I think I'll just report it to Whitney's floor counselor. I don't want to be involved any further."

With that, she turned on her heel and walked out. Laura Bates had about as much sympathy as a hornet. There was no sense now in trying to talk to Whitney. A word to that counselor would be better so's she could understand the girl and help her. It was right about then that things started happening so I sort of lost track of the situation.

There's a tradition here on Founder's Day that was started after Winifred West died. It all began when some of the students and faculty swore they saw her ghost at different times and places in the buildings as if she was still looking after her beloved college.

Now, every year at midnight on Founder's Day a student chosen by a secret committee to play her ghost walks the halls in a long black skirt and shirt-waist with only a candle to light her way. I don't mind saying

that it was downright scary seeing that figure gliding down the darkened hallways. I said as much to Lois.

"The girls love it, Melva, like to be spooky. But by the next morning it's all forgotten."

"Sort of like Halloween, I suppose. How about you, Lois? Have you ever seen the real ghost?"

"Sure'n you know I'd have told you if I had. Oh, there have been times when I've felt I was being watched, but I blame it on Willard," she snorted.

Lois was right. By the next night I'd forgotten all about the ghost. About an hour after the ten o'clock bell I had to take a stroll down to the bathroom. Too much herb tea with the popcorn Lois had made would never have held till morning. It's a good thing I got there and was on my way back, which was when the lights went out.

Them dorm halls don't have windows, so it was like black velvet. I felt my way along the wall and kept going until my hand ran into something soft and warm. I let out a war whoop and heard a scream at the same time. If the lights hadn't come back on then, I can't tell you what might have happened.

Standing there looking pale and frightened was Whitney Ross. I got my breath back first. "What are you doing in this

neck of the woods so late?"

"I . . . I couldn't sleep. I was going down to get a soda from the soft drink machine." She looked near to crying.

"I'll go with you. Maybe we can talk a little."

She fidgeted around and then said, "No. I think I'll just go on back to bed. Good night."

Lois told me a couple of interesting things when I got back to her rooms. One was that the lights in these old buildings do go out sometimes but usually during a storm, which wasn't the case this night, and that Whitney Ross was way off course.

Until next morning after I'd bundled Francie off to school and Lois came twittering in waving her feather duster I hadn't thought too much about last night's happenings.

"Melva! The ghost walked last night! I mean the real one."

"Sit down, Lois, talk slow and tell me."

"Two of the girls saw it, this figure in old fashioned clothes and a big straw hat. It stood at the foot of their beds, shook a finger at them, and disappeared."

"Was it when the lights were out?"

"It must have been. One of the girls tried to turn on the reading lamp over her bed but there was no power."

"Was their room anywhere near where I ran into Whitney?"

"Yes." Lois's eyes were wide. "You don't think . . ."

"That girl's troubled for sure, but why would she want to spook anyone?"

"Maybe they've been making fun of her for mooning over Laura Bates."

"Maybe. She does seem real high strung. I hope that counselor knows how to handle her. She sure didn't want to talk to me last night."

Lois fluttered her hands in the air. "Ooh, Melva. I truly hope it was Whitney and not a real ghost!"

I meandered around that day enough to know the whole school was buzzing about the ghost of Winifred West. Even Willard was jumpy. I didn't see Whitney at all, but Laura Bates and I met up at the entrance to the dining room.

"Say, Laura, how's that little problem you've been having?" I didn't mention Whitney's name with others maybe overhearing.

"What? Oh, I know what you mean. The counselor talked to her and it seems to have helped. At least I haven't seen as much of her lately."

Well, that made me feel some better. After lunch I went down to the indoor pool to watch the girls practicing for a water bal-

let. They were doing a can-can number that was real cute and a little bit spicy. It was for the sports pageant they put on every year that's open to the public.

It wasn't till close to the ten o'clock bell that the girls started getting skittery. Everyone headed for their rooms, and the place was so quiet it almost hurt your ears. Lois and Francie were all tucked in, but I sat up in my robe and slippers. It was near midnight when I heard the old elevator start up.

Because it makes so much racket and the shaft is open-work like the cage, you can tell where it's coming from and it had started on the first floor. By the time I ran down the hall and around the corner I could see the top of the car moving up. It had to stop on three, since we're the top story. Before it clanked to a halt I could see that it was empty. I didn't have time to get the creeps because Willard came thundering up the stairs.

"Who's running that elevator after hours?" he puffed.

"Looks like nobody. It sure didn't stop until it got here."

Willard's face was one big scowl. "I won't stand for these pranks in my buildings. Someone's going to be in deep trouble when I catch them."

"Come on now, maybe the wiring in the elevator set it off on its own."

"And maybe you can explain how Miss West's picture got hung upside down and the moaning coming from the library?"

"Huh?"

"I've been chasing shadows all night, but I'll get the little smart-aleck behind it." He marched off down the hall before I could ask him any questions.

That was only the beginning. More of the girls saw the ghost, always at night, the elevator kept making empty trips, and along with them bells going off at strange times, the whole place was in an uproar. One of the girls got the best look at "Winnie's Ghost" as it got named when she was looking out her window into the courtyard, couldn't sleep.

"The moon was bright," she said. "I saw the ghost then, dressed in something long and sort of filmy gray. She was wearing a large old fashioned picture hat and seemed to float across the courtyard and disappeared in the shadow of the building."

Nurse Perkins was up to her little white cap in girls needing treatment for hysteria, and you could tell that even the faculty was getting edgy. As for Willard, you could almost see his nerve ends. Lois went around corners with them little beady eyes out on stems and her

feather duster in front of her for protection.

Things started getting nasty. The costumes for the water ballet were found torn to pieces and tossed in the pool. Written on the blackboard the swimming instructor used to work out formations was the word SINFUL! with a W underneath it. Girls who were known to date a lot found the word HARLOT on their mirrors. Shrieks and moans echoed through the halls in the middle of the night.

Then came the morning Francie and I were due to move back to The Cabin. To tell you the truth, I was more than ready to get away from the goings-on. Not that I sure hadn't tried to figure things out while I was there, but a little peace and quiet in my own place might shed a new light on why they were happening.

It was early on a Saturday morning when I took our suitcases and a sack of Francie's toys around to the elevator and pushed the button. The car rattled its way up to a stop and I could see that it wasn't empty. I opened the door to find Whitney Ross sitting on the floor with her back against the wall of the car. Her eyes were wide open in surprise, and she was dead.

I left the door open so the car couldn't run and made a beeline to Lois's to phone Sheriff Cot-

ter. He's the law in Montrose, a little town just down the highway. Lois was in a twit, but looking after Francie gave her something to do. I went back to the elevator.

Being so early, I was sure Willard would be showing up to check on why it was running again, and, especially now, why it wasn't.

But he never came. Sheriff Cotter was there in ten minutes flat.

"I swear, Melva, you're my best customer." His big round face was grim. "Any ideas on how this happened?"

I told him about the ghost and all of the goings-on, even how I'd wondered if Whitney was behind it. We both took a closer look at her before his boys removed the body, but neither one of us could figure out what killed her.

"I hate to admit it, sheriff, but she looks like she died of fright."

"Doc'll tell us in due time, Melva. Now, unspook yourself and tell me anything else that might help."

Willard seemed worth mentioning, the way he got so upset with some of the girls, how he was always skulking around, and why he wasn't there now. Beyond that, I didn't have a clue, but I was sure anxious to get back to The Cabin where I

had my own generator for lights, no bells and no ghosts.

Francie was glad to be home, too. She oohed and clapped her little hands over our "good as new" cabin and settled down with her dolls. I got busy making up a list of supplies for my larder and put on a big pot of coffee.

Sheriff Cotter showed up later that afternoon. Luckily, I'd had time to bake. Like always, we sat in one of the booths and put our heads together over mugs of java and some of my chocolate cake.

"Whitney Ross was murdered, Melva. Doc said the weapon pierced her heart."

"What kind of weapon, sheriff? Neither one of us saw any wound."

He rubbed a hand across his mouth and his cheeks got redder than usual. "And neither one of us really believes in spooks, either. But what killed the Ross girl was a long, old fashioned hatpin."

I hate to say this but I could feel the hair on my head go up and my skin got all prickly.

"I'm going to keep on asking questions about a flesh and blood killer, sheriff. Spook'll be my last resort." But I took a big swig of hot coffee to settle me down. "Now, about what time did she die?"

"Near as Doc could tell it was

around two in the morning. He thinks the killer dragged her into the elevator."

"How'd he figure that?"

"Carpet particles between the backs of her shoes and socks."

I had an awful vision of a gray ghost taking poor Whitney under the arms and pulling her down the long dark hall to the elevator. Then I remembered that when I pushed the button that morning the car had come up from the basement.

"Sheriff, did you talk to Willard yet? Where was he this morning?" I told him about the elevator's location then.

"He says he overslept; that he's been run ragged trying to find out who's behind all the 'mischief.'"

"Did he see or hear anything last night?"

"Yeah. I was coming to that. Willard says that sometime after one o'clock he heard the elevator start up from the main floor and went tearing over there to see if he could catch whoever pushed the button. He swears he saw someone in a long gray dress and a big hat disappearing around the corner."

"And?"

"Nothing. He ran after it but the halls were empty. He went back to his room then, to bed. Later he heard the elevator come back down to the base-

ment from the second floor, but he was so fed up with the whole thing that he didn't get up to check it out."

"That must have been when the killer sent Whitney's body down. Second floor has to be where it happened, or close. Hmm."

"What's brewing in that mind of yours, Melva?"

"Whitney Ross had a single over in another wing on the third floor. Nobody in their right mind would drag a body that far, let alone down a flight of stairs. She could have been prowling around like she was the night I bumped into her. But why?"

Sheriff Cotter took a bite of his second piece of cake before he dropped the last bit of information that really set my mind off in a new direction.

"Whitney Ross was due to have a large trust fund released to her the end of this year."

"Oh-oh. I knew her parents were killed. Must have had money, huh?"

"Ross Electronics. Do you suppose there's someone next in line or maybe a crooked attorney that wanted her out of the way?"

"Sheriff, you've just made the whole thing into a bigger puzzle. We could have two separate cases going on here. There's a ghost playing tricks and maybe

someone sent to get rid of an heiress."

He let out a big sigh. "You're right. Only thing I can think of is to go up to the main office and check the files on any newcomers, outside of the whole darn junior class, that is."

"I can tell you a couple. Walter Lange and Laura Bates are the only ones on faculty." I also mentioned how Whitney had been drawn to Laura because she resembled her mother.

I'd barely cleared the booth with Sheriff Cotter on his way when Lois came flapping in.

"Preserve us! It's turned into a madhouse up there. Could you spare a cup o' tea? I've plenty to tell you." She flopped down in the booth like a rag doll.

"More ghosts?"

"No. Worse." She looked around her. "They've done a lovely job here." Then her face screwed up and tears brimmed in her eyes. "Too bad we won't get to enjoy it much longer."

"Lois! What in tarnation are you talking about?"

"Girls are packing to leave. Parents are calling, even some of the faculty are about to fly the coop because of all that's happened. Whitney Ross's death was the capper."

"She was murdered, Lois, not scared to death by Winifred West's ghost."

"Ooh, faith 'n' that's even worse. Being a private school that kind of thing will put Woodberry out of business."

"How's that?"

"I remember overhearing the trustees talking last year about funding and how important full enrollment was to keep the school going." Lois sniffled and took a sip of tea.

"Well, they've done okay for over a hundred years."

"These are harder times now. Private schools are a luxury." Her face clouded up again. "One board member spoke about an offer from some rich duck who wanted to buy Woodberry and turn it into a fancy resort."

"But that was last year, and we're still here, old girl."

"Not if too many tuitions have to be refunded. I hope that Mr. Chatfield or whatever his name was doesn't get wind of this."

"Who?"

"The one who wanted to buy this place. Melva? Do you think Sheriff Cotter can keep things out of the papers?"

"I don't know, Lois. Trouble is, Whitney Ross was about to come into a family fortune. Reporters love stuff like that."

She threw up her hands. "Coo! That does it. I may as well go pack along with the rest."

"Why don't you go lie down and get some rest instead. All

of a sudden I have a feeling Woodberry'll survive."

Up to now my mind had been going in circles, but I hoped the phone calls I decided to make would set me off in the right direction. Maybe I'd find a few answers and catch me a handful of ghost.

None of the girls came down to The Cabin that night. Guess they were too scared. I was anxious to try out my new grill, so when Sheriff Cotter came back with a bad case of eyestrain and an empty stomach, I fixed him and me and Francie some nice big burgers. After Francie went off to her room with a coloring book I poured more coffee so's me and the sheriff could settle down and talk.

"I didn't turn up much of anything, Melva. All the files seemed to be in order, nothing to make a person wonder."

"The two faculty members?"

"Walter Lange is rock solid. Laura Bates? Well, not much on her. This is her first position, but she's well qualified."

"According to her license plate, she's from the city."

"That's what it says in her file," he shrugged.

"I don't know if it'll help, but have you checked out the registration on that spiffy yellow car she drives?"

"No, but I will. Good idea." He made for my phone.

While we waited I told him what I'd found out and what I figured as a motive. Sheriff Cotter looked disappointed when I couldn't go on to explain Whitney Ross's murder. I wasn't. My grandma always said that once you found the end of the string you could untie the knot, and she was usually right.

We both jumped when the phone rang. As he listened on the receiver, Sheriff Cotter's face lit up and he nodded at me. Then he made a call to order a search warrant. His deputy arrived in less than an hour, and we all went up to the main buildings to pay a call on Laura Bates.

Laura's real name was Sandra Chatfield. We found the gray chiffon dress and big picture hat in her closet. She was so distressed over what had happened that Sheriff Cotter and I just listened while it all spilled out.

Her father always got what he wanted, and he wanted Woodberry to turn it into a ritzy health spa. The only way was if the school failed to keep up its reputation and enrollment. Sandra had a friend who'd attended Woodberry and told her about the ghost. When the opening in the athletic department came up, it was easy for Chatfield to get his daughter in with fake credentials.

Sandra huddled in her chair and told us the rest.

"It was my idea to play the ghost," she smiled wistfully. "Daddy was so excited about it. He really wanted Woodberry, and it frustrated him to think he couldn't buy it as long as the college continued to maintain itself. It was to be fun, cloak and dagger. I didn't plan on Whitney Ross. Why couldn't she leave me alone?" She began to sob and then took a deep breath.

"Last night," she went on, "I was going back to my rooms after giving Willard some grief with the elevator. I stopped outside my door to take off that big hat. I had the hatpin in one hand when I heard a noise behind me. It was Whitney. She was forever following me, lurking around just to catch a glimpse of me. Poor girl. I really hated the whole thing.

"I think she truly thought I was the ghost of Winifred West about to enter Laura Bates's door to harm her. She began whimpering, 'No, no, no!' and then made a lunge at me. Of course, I automatically put out my hands to stop her. I... I forgot about the hatpin. It all happened so fast. She literally impaled herself on it.

"When I realized she was dead, I put her in the elevator and sent it to the basement,

hoping Willard would find her. I'm so sorry, so sorry! It shouldn't have happened. If only Whitney had left me alone..."

Sandra's eyes stared blankly off into space.

I looked at Sheriff Cotter. He looked sad and tired but glad it was all over with.

"There goes your knot," I whispered, and left him and his deputy to their work.

Sandra Chatfield was charged with manslaughter; her father drew a suspended sentence and made a large grant to Woodberry that, according to the trustees, will be a nice sinking fund for some time to come. I'm happy to say that when the final story came out the publicity did wonders for enrollment.

I threw a little party to celebrate the new Cabin along with getting rid of the ghost and Woodberry's being saved. Lois, Sheriff Cotter, me, and Francie had a high old time. I grilled them steaks just right and made a lemon meringue pie that almost floated off the plate. After dinner we had some more coffee and talked about the Chatfields.

I turned to Lois. "You're the one that started the whole thing to unravel."

Her little black eyes went wide. "Me? Sure 'n' how'd I do that?"

"When you told me about Mr.

Chatfield wanting to buy the place. Up to then, I'd been trying to fit Willard into some sort of crazy motive, or one of the girls with a mean streak wanting to upset everybody. I even considered a real ghost."

Sheriff Cotter hooted. "Oh, come on now, Melva."

"Well, what Lois told me was sure a lot more solid, a reasonable motive. That's when I started picking at strings. I called one of the trustees (he says my burgers are the best) to see if Chatfield was still interested in Woodberry. 'Very much so' was his answer. It didn't take half a brain then to eyeball Laura Bates a little closer, being she was a new-comer.

"She had a city license on her car, so I called the library there and had 'em go through a few directories, past and current. No Laura Bates. That's when I suspected she was a plant, but I never dreamed she'd turn out to be Chatfield's daughter. Only thing I can't figure, and I meant to ask Sandra, was why she drove her own car, and a yellow one at that, when they must

have gone to a lot of trouble faking her credentials."

"I thought about that, too," Sheriff Cotter grinned, pleased with himself, "and I asked her. She said it never crossed her mind because she never imagined her little caper would backfire. She just planned to spook the school into trouble and resign at the end of the semester."

Lois shook her head mournfully. "And it was her causing Whitney Ross's death that almost did sink us all."

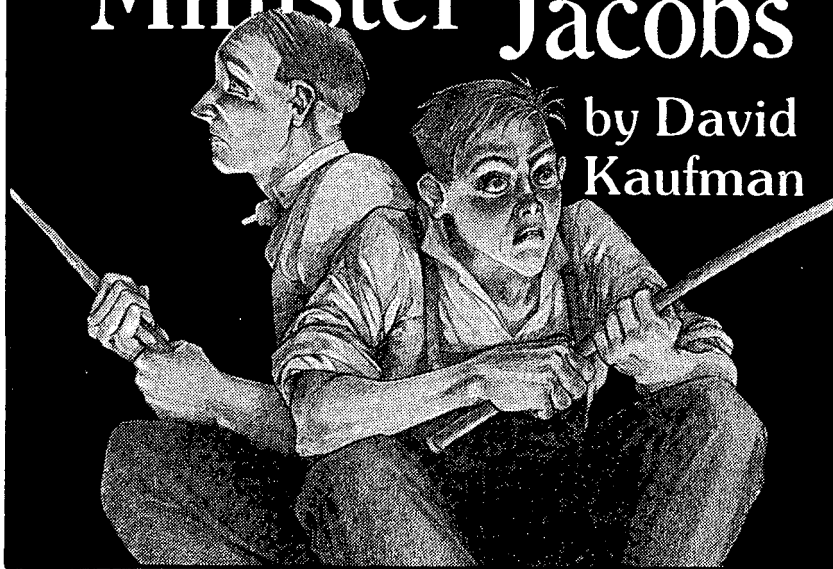
Things settled down then into a nice peaceful routine except for one little incident which happened in the chemistry lab. One of them burners got knocked over accidentally and started a pretty bad fire with lots of heavy smoke.

There were five girls trapped in the room until, as they all swore later, a woman in a long black skirt and shirtwaist led them to safety through a door back of a cupboard that no one for years had known was there. Then she was gone.

I'm biding my time before I tell *that* one to Sheriff Cotter!

Goodbye to Minister Jacobs

by David Kaufman



I suppose it is a fortunate thing that I am around to tell what truly happened at the lake that night. I was with Mr. Jacobs, right at his side clear to the end when it really counted. Not that I could have done anything to help him, no matter how hard I tried. But at least I'm alive and I can keep telling the story, whatever people think of me.

At the time, I had been living with Uncle Levi, on his farm just up river, maybe half a mile from town. My parents left me a farm high up in the valley to live on, but Uncle Levi thought that it would be better for me if I got away from that place, if I sold it and put the money somewhere safe for a rainy day and came and lived with him. Well, he was my uncle, and so I sold it and was with him for about two years at the time.

I did some odds and ends work around the farm to help Uncle Levi, even some of the cooking, and I guess I was company for him.

Illustration by Judy Mitchell

All in all he treated me right, so we both got something out of it.

I also worked around the church for Reverend Jacobs, the minister. I knew him well, Reverend Jacobs. And I will tell all of his story just as honestly as I can, exactly like it happened to him that night. You can count on the truth.

It was Uncle Levi who fixed it so that I could have the job of cleaning up around the church and doing the odd job that came up. I liked that work. It held my interest. Being a handyman of sorts around a church is kind of an easy job, even for somebody like me, there not being too much around a church that can go wrong, and so I mostly scrubbed the floors and mowed the lawn, and maybe once a month I washed whatever dust there was off the little stained glass windows our town was so proud of.

Mr. Jacobs quickly took a liking to me. He was about ten years older than I was, and I got to feeling very close to him and thinking about him as the big brother I never had. I trusted him completely. And he talked, I don't know, he talked to me, if you know what I mean. He took the time. Lots of folks, especially folks outside of Garlock's Bend, seem to take me for granted, and I sometimes get the feeling that maybe they would be more comfortable if I weren't around. My guess is people think I'm just a little slow.

I do keep to myself, more or less, and I'm kind of shy, but if you ask me, I never did think I was slow. I always sort of thought that was an unfair thing.

Well, anyway, he saw that I had jobs lined up when I came to the church to do some work, and then he'd stop by and I'd quit whatever I was doing and we'd go to talking for the longest time. And once in a while he called for me to quit completely and come on up to the porch, and then he'd give me some iced tea to drink. We'd sit on that old wicker porch swing he brought with him when he came to our town to run the church, and we'd swing and we'd swing. And talk and laugh.

They were good times, those.

I never once had the feeling he was talking down to me or making fun of me in a way I couldn't quite catch on to. I also sense *that* around some people, but I never felt that way around him. As I said, he looked after me, and I trusted him.

Well, this was on my birthday. I was twenty-four, and Mr. Jacobs had fixed it with my uncle that he could take me fishing all night. As a birthday present.

We ended up fishing at the high end of the lake, maybe just a quarter mile up from the church actually, back an old dirt road to

where the river came down out of the hills and started to get wide. That was a real good place, Mr. Jacobs said.

I can still remember tramping along behind him on the path by the water, lugging the rods and some old blankets that we most likely would need. Mr. Jacobs carried a lantern and a shovel and some more stuff that we'd be using, and he had sandwiches and soda pop.

He led the way ahead of me, going just right, singing real quiet to himself in the twilight. Now and again we scared some big old bullfrog plop into the water as we moved up the shore. I felt very comfortable with him, like we belonged together. I didn't feel awkward or shy at all.

At the high edge almost straight over from Garlock's Bend, we found this sort of clearing and set up our stuff. The ground there was covered with long straw grass, just as soft, with an easy slope down to the water where we could sit and fish. Kind of open so we could see the sky. And not too many trees, just only a few here and there. It was almost like a little park, that clearing, and then lots of trees and brush right at the edge of it, sort of closing it in.

There was no moon that night, but it was so clear you could see the stars twinkling clear down to the horizon, where they were suddenly cut off by the dark hilltop opposite. The night air was clean and moist. Things seemed even beautiful that night.

At first, anyway. Things were all right at first.

Mr. Jacobs fixed up the lantern and got it going.

He told me what to do, and I did it. I really knew how to set up a camp and I knew how to fish, but he was so kind to me, I didn't want to make him feel bad nor embarrassed. So I set the covers down where he told me to and spread them out, and I got the rods put together, and then we both got some twigs and some wood collected for a fire. And as quick as that we were set up.

The propane lantern threw off a lot of white light. Everything close around us got a strange kind of bluish chalky look to it. Then came the sudden darkness like a wall. And the *f-f-f-s-s-s-s-ing* sound the lantern made was kind of eerie in all that quiet.

There were other night sounds, of course.

There was the river, first off. The Susquehanna at Garlock's Bend is pretty big by the time it gets down to us. Somehow it never seems bigger than it does at night. You sit there watching and listening, with the lights of the town just a few and far off, and you think that the river doesn't make any noise, but soon you really begin to hear it in the dark, kind of whooshing along with a low

hissing sound, kind of gurgling. And every now and again you see it pulling a whole big log along, and then you really know how deep and powerful it is. It's downright scary, actually.

And then there are the noises of the night animals. Mostly soft and hesitating and timid, the little scratchings of tiny creatures moving around in the darkness, searching for food, and a bird now and then coo-cooing in the night fog, peaceful and calming. Maybe there's this big dog far off somewhere barking slow and persistent till if you were closer it would really get to bothering you. And then you begin to hear the little animals so clear that they seem even louder than the dog. It's all kind of sad and kind of happy, and it wants to make you smile somehow.

I guess Mr. Jacobs sensed what I was thinking. "The night is a good time, isn't it," he said.

"Yes," I said. "I like the night."

"I can tell that." He eased himself down onto the grass behind the second rod. "Well," he said. "Let's just see if we can't get ourselves a fish or two."

I like roll casting, especially at night. There's the nice feel of the rod whipping down and picking up the bait easy in this big arc, plopping it down ever so gently just where you want it. If you do it right there's only a little splash, if any at all. You can hardly see what's going on when it's dark, so it's pretty much a matter of touch. But that's a really good feeling when you get it to going right. Like the rod's a part of your hand.

It kind of tickled me to sense Mr. Jacobs watching me. I think he had no idea at all that I knew how to fish. At first I was going to let him show me how right from the beginning, like I didn't know anything, but I figured that wouldn't be honest, and in the end he'd maybe think I was making fun, so I decided to protect the trust I knew we both felt. I fished like I was taught to right off.

"You've had a fishing rod in your hands before," he said gently.

"Yeah, well," I said, "my dad took me fishing some, years ago." I shook my head. "I learned from watching him. I haven't done it for a long time, though. Uncle Levi don't believe much in fishing. I was really glad when you asked me to go along."

"My grandmother used to say that God doesn't deduct from your life the time you spend fishing," he said.

"In the garden, neither," I said. "I've heard both those."

We really did seem to get along. We talked just a little longer pretty much the same, I can't remember about what, and we really got quiet then. That happens sometimes when men are together.

There's just a sense of it's time to stop talking. I've seen it before.

Neither of us caught anything in maybe an hour. We sat there quietly, fishing, lulled by the river, and somehow it didn't matter if we caught anything or not.

There was a night breeze that came up easy from across the river. It began to cloud up some, covering the stars and making it a lot darker. It was a moist evening, and quiet. And just warm enough.

The lights of Garlock's Bend, we could barely see them down river from us, had been going out one by one, so little by little we got to being all alone in the small circle of light of the lantern. And as far as we could tell then, about a million miles from anywhere.

Finally Mr. Jacobs pointed to the last of the lights we could see, and he laughed and sang a bit of "Lower Lights," deep-voiced and rousing, both of us chiming in with the line, "... of the lights along the shore."

That was a favorite hymn of mine.

Finally the last light went out. We were alone. There was only the lantern.

Then the strangest thing happened.

Do you know how, when things are going good in the woods, and it's night, there are these happy little animal noises, like I mentioned before? And you don't hardly know that they're there, you don't really hear them. But then suddenly you are very aware of them because they're gone? They've stopped. And you get to knowing how quiet it can *really* get?

That happened to us. We both noticed it at the same time. Suddenly all of the sound stopped but the hissing of the lantern.

It was as if the only noise in the world right then was that lantern. Maybe for a little while I kidded myself into thinking it was only my imagination, I don't know. But there's always noise, even if you don't pay attention to it. When it's gone you can suddenly *feel* the quiet.

That's how it was exactly. The quiet was awesome.

I remember one time years ago when I was about eleven. There was a cave our way and my father wanted to take me down in it.

You see, we had this family lived up the road, and they had a son about my age, Henry. Now Henry was blind. My father and I had talked about him some because I found it hard to play with him, or take him along, or even just be patient with him. And I guess I made my father feel bad because I was so thoughtless.

So this day we got all packed up with sandwiches and quarts of tea and lanterns, and away we went to the cave. My father seemed a little distant, or thoughtful maybe, but I was so excited that it didn't matter. I really wanted that experience so badly I didn't hardly even notice how he was.

We worked our way deep inside the cave, my father helping me a lot with my footing and stuff, watching out for me, taking care of me, and suddenly he stopped and took my lantern. "I want you to know something," he said. He was looking at me with the most patient, sad look. "This," he said, after what seemed long minutes to me, "is what it's like to be blind." And then he turned out my lantern and then his, too.

I screamed and began to cry and I held on to him in terror. I guess because it was so different from what I thought darkness was. I never knew anything so complete or so sudden like that before or since. And I will never forget that lesson from my daddy.

Well, this quiet was something like that darkness, only maybe a little more frightening because things couldn't be like that.

Mr. Jacobs sensed it, too. I could tell he was scared. Neither of us said anything. Not a word. We just stayed there hunched over our rods. And then, as it kept on, we got to looking at each other. All this quiet. He had a washed out look on his face from the lantern, and he seemed to be as frightened as I was. There simply was no sound. I mean, there was *no* sound but the hissing of the lantern.

All this was in only a couple of minutes.

My face felt flushed and cold at the same time. My hands got to shaking. I couldn't help but think of the dark and my daddy somehow. I just stared at Mr. Jacobs.

Finally he managed a smile and put out his hand and took mine.

"It's okay," he said. "It's really okay."

"But what is it?" I managed. "What's doing it?" There just wasn't any sound of any kind.

He squeezed my hand a good one and then let it go. "Well, I don't know." He tried to laugh. "It's no tiger," he said. "I can tell you that."

I knew right away what he meant. Animals get quiet when they are scared. They're hiding, actually.

"Maybe bear," I said.

"Maybe."

I guess it could have been a bear. We have a lot of them. I tried

to think it was a bear. But there's this other thing, too. Crickets aren't afraid of bear, and animals get quiet only when they are frightened. I mean *really* frightened.

"Maybe we should go home," he said finally. His voice sounded hollow and kind of ringing in all that quiet. "Do you want to go home?"

"No," I said. "I don't."

Now I wish we had. Now that it's too late by far.

"Do you?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I'll stay."

I brought in my line.

"Something's wrong, though," I said. "Something bad."

He shrugged. "Maybe it *is* a tiger," he said, smiling, "come to eat us up."

"There's something out there."

It had really clouded over now, and there wasn't a star you could see. Except for the light from the fire and the lantern, everything, even the sky, was black as you could want. And there was a wetness to the breeze now, as if a rain was coming.

The fire was a way down. I put on three or four good heavy branches and it flared up and felt warm, and comforting somehow. The sparks crackled loud in all that quiet.

It was a real puzzle, though. All of it.

Thinking about something bad is funny. Your brain turns it round and round, working it all through, looking at it from every side, and then all of a sudden you can't think of the badness any longer. Your head kind of shuts it off. And then somehow it doesn't seem so bad. Finally you get to talking, just as if the thing, whatever it was, never happened.

That's how it was with us. We even began moving around, in spite of the quiet, making our own noise.

Then all of a sudden there was a loud smacking sound out on the lake. And then another. Big, heavy smashes into the water. Like some giant of a fish had jumped a couple of times, only those noises were a whole lot louder than any fish could have made. A whole lot louder. They were *immense* sounds.

And then there were other noises out there right after. I can't hardly describe them. Kind of little splashes, and deep throaty sounds some big animal might make. Not at the edge of the lake, but way out in the middle somewhere. Some animal playing around. Almost like it was just having fun. But far deeper out than any animal I know about would go. For sure no bear would be out.

that far. And the water at that distance out was at least a couple of dozen feet deep.

We couldn't see anything. Even holding the lantern up high we couldn't see anything.

Some ripples had got in to us and jiggled the water along the shoreline a little bit, like a boat does for you.

Then the noise out there stopped. It just stopped.

And just like that all the sounds of the night and the river had come back as if nothing at all had ever happened.

We both sat there for a while, taking it all in. And then we got to laughing. Somehow all of the tension was gone and we were laughing out loud, as if nothing unusual at all had ever happened.

I wish we had run away from there. How I wish that. I was going to say we should leave. I just didn't.

"That was some fish."

"Yeah," I said. "But I sure wouldn't want to catch a hold of that fella." We both giggled as if that was the funniest thing we had ever heard. And then I said, "Mr. Jacobs, what do you think that was?" Whatever it was, I had hardly any fear of it left by that time. It was gone, or so I thought.

And all of the noises were normal again, the dog barking, the little scratchings on the ground, and you could hear everything again. Just as usual. All of it. That was the oddest part, how everything was suddenly all right again.

"I don't know," he said, and he stood up.

Then directly the thing happened that took Mr. Jacobs.

He had gone right down to the edge of the water, rinsing off his hands. But the next thing I knew there was this hump or swell down in the water, you could barely see it, way down under and far off at first. And it started coming towards us. It was more like you could hear it rather than see it, right off anyway, a kind of a low gurgling noise, and it came rushing up towards us to the edge of the water where we were.

It stopped suddenly a dozen or maybe twenty feet off shore, this big bulge of something. God knows what. It just stopped.

And the force of it pushed in a big wave, big enough to come rushing clear up to where I was sitting. The wave crashed against the lantern and shattered the hot mantle and as quick as that we were surrounded by this frightening, sudden darkness.

"Don't move!" Mr. Jacobs shouted. "Oh, Jesus! David! Stay where you are!"

And then I heard this fearful yell and a splash like he had lost

his balance in the darkness and fallen into the water. And a kind of white panic and wailing with the splashes as he thrashed his way back up out of the water onto the edge of the shore.

Then he was out of the water and sitting on the shore, just slightly in front of where I was. "Oh, God," I heard him wail. "Oh, sweet Jesus Christ!"

"What was that?"

"Stay there!" he yelled. "Stay there, David."

"I'm coming down to you," I hissed at him. "I'm coming down to you."

"For God's sake. Don't move!"

I could hardly talk I was shaking so. It was pitch dark. I remembered blind Henry and what my daddy had taught me, and I knew I had to help. I just had to help Mr. Jacobs.

I began inching down towards the shore to where he was, to where I could just make out the shape of him. Whether he wanted me to or not. I suddenly felt cold. And I couldn't see hardly anything at all, but I knew I had to get closer to where he was.

"Are you okay?" I whispered. I surprised myself that I was whispering, but I was afraid to call out loud.

"I'm all right," he said coldly. He sounded as if he were terrified, and somewhere that scared me a whole lot more than I would like to admit even now. He must have heard me moving. "But be quiet. And don't move. I'm going to try to move back up to you."

I could hear him crayfishing his way back up the slope to me. It was so dark that I could barely see him moving. Kind of like I saw this dark patch moving up to me, but I could only have guessed it was a person. God, how I wanted us to be out of there. There were only the sounds of him in the long grass, moving slowly, and his heavy breathing.

And then it happened. There was this rushing sound of water falling, like you'd make if you stood up suddenly when you were in the tub. With the water crashing down. Only a hundred times louder.

And then a thing looming up right in front of us. Right up out of the water. Without any shape to it at all. A blackness moving in all that blackness. The night was so dark that I couldn't see it clearly and yet I could. More like I could feel it getting bigger and bigger right in front of us at the edge of the water. It was huge. And the air was suddenly warmer and so stinking and rotten I could hardly stand it. I knew that nothing could be there and yet

something *was* there. I couldn't help it, I screamed. And then I screamed again.

"Damn you! Just damn you, I say!" Mr. Jacobs bellowed, in a way that was unreal, and I couldn't tell which way he was yelling and for an instant I thought he was yelling at me but I knew that couldn't be.

I had got up to his side, but he grabbed me and threw me backwards, behind him, quicker even than I can tell about it.

"Stay down!" he screamed. "Stay down, David!"

And then this thing, this darkness, instead of moving fast slowed down until it was not moving, until it was poised over us, Mr. Jacobs standing there defiant and me cowering, and it seemed almost as if it were startled by us. Or as if it were looking us over. And then it got bigger and bigger still and it seemed to be moving slowly towards us again.

Next, God help me, I thought I could hear some sort of unreal raspy breathing. The thing was breathing!

And Mr. Jacobs was yelling louder and screaming things out into the darkness. I tried, but I just couldn't understand what he was talking about.

Then the thing seemed to raise itself way up over the top of us. Slowly, majestically almost, it seemed to widen itself out and ease forward until it touched Mr. Jacobs. Then the next thing I knew, Mr. Jacobs was gone, the thing had him, and with no effort at all had taken him and moved back out into the water and the darkness.

And as quick as that there was almost no noise now, none except Mr. Jacobs, moaning softly. I couldn't see him at all, but I knew it was holding him out there. Just holding him.

There were a few branches from the fire still, and so I grabbed the end of the biggest one like it was a torch and I held it up high to try to see. I made Mr. Jacobs' face out in all that darkness, in the middle of the blackest darkness, just up out of the water.

Well, that moaning was so sad and so pitiful that it got to me, and I began to move down the shore towards the water. Somehow I didn't even care about myself. I would see if I could pull on Mr. Jacobs and get him loose from the thing, whatever it was. I knew I had to try.

The smell of the thing was awful, hot and wet and like the lake was polluted. I thought I was going to be sick.

I was at the edge of the water, holding the log as high as I could get it so I could at least see a little, when Mr. Jacobs made the

most horrible sound I ever heard in my life. Like a tearing sound but coming from his mouth. And the pale white of his face floating in all that darkness about broke my heart.

Then, as if it were the most casual thing in the world, the thing seemed to flop over backwards, still holding Mr. Jacobs, the water spraying out everywhere. It swam slowly away from the shore. When it got far enough out it sort of rolled over and plunged down under the water.

It disappeared. Like that, it was as if the thing had never even been there. In only a few seconds the water was calm and there wasn't a sound but the night.

They were both gone.

I just stood there. Suddenly I began screaming, screaming and shaking. I couldn't control myself. And I felt so helpless. It should have been me. I knew it should have been me that was taken. For a terrible instant I had this awful feeling of gladness that it was not. That was a horrible thing to be thinking. I was *glad* it was Mr. Jacobs. The thought was so ugly I just wanted to die. Then finally I got myself together and I left everything as it was and ran, falling and weeping—running, tripping, terrified that the thing was coming up behind me and would grab me in the darkness.

No one in Garlock's Bend was awake, of course, and so I pounded on Bill Miller's door, back of his store. Pounded till my hands ached. I knew he was upstairs, he was always home. He had to be. And I kept pounding.

When he finally got to the door, I blurted out to him as best I could what had happened, that Mr. Jacobs had been taken under out at the lake by something in the water, out where we were fishing. And he had to be dead. It took me a while, and I must have babbled and rambled and made hardly any sense at all. But I did my best to tell what happened.

I told the truth. That turned out to be a mistake.

Bill Miller listened to me wailing for a while, and then he got me calmed some and he asked me to tell it all again. Slowly.

I did, and then he went and got some men woke up and some floodlights, and soon they went out to where we were and looked. They looked for hours, wading out into the water and shining their floods this way and that, and they looked the next day when the sun was up. Going up and down the shoreline and all. But they never found nothing. Nothing at all. It was as if Mr. Jacobs had never even existed. And there was nothing that even gave a little bit of a hint of the thing, whatever it was, out in the water. Except

for the shattered lantern, nothing was even out of place. Nothing.

I blamed myself. I felt guilty about it, about Mr. Jacobs' getting taken away. I really did just want to die. I guess I will always feel that. I'll never forget that look on his face, and the sounds he made. Like he knew what was about to happen. And how he had stood in front of me, had pushed me away, to protect me—I'll never forget that, either.

So that was what happened to Mr. Jacobs. I was the last one to see him, I am the only one who can tell what happened, and nobody believes what I say.

I wish there was some way to convince people to listen. And I wish I could trade places with him. I wish I could do that.

That's a ton of wishing.

I stayed up in my room at Uncle Levi's for about five or six days. I only ate a little and I couldn't work, and I didn't want to be near anyone. So I stayed alone.

Then one morning just almost a week later, Mr. Miller and maybe about five other men came to the house. I could see them out the window, talking with Uncle Levi. When all of them started for the house, I knew what was going to happen. I guess I had known ever since I first told Mr. Miller the story. And I was so exhausted from worry and lack of sleep that I was almost glad they were coming.

It turns out that two of the men were detectives from the state police. I heard them all going into the front room and Uncle Levi came and got me and then they asked me questions and questions and then more questions. And I had to tell the story over and over. That was one of the worst parts.

I guess it was a couple of hours anyway that I was with them. Then all of a sudden they kind of just looked at each other and then at me and got up and left. And that was that.

In the end probably it was easy for them to forget that morning, but I'll never forget it. Telling that story over and over.

One thing it did, though, one thing about telling that story so many times, it really did make Mr. Jacobs gone for me. Forever. No more idle thoughts that one day he was going to send for me because he wanted something done at the church. I told the story of how he died too many times to ever think that one again.

I've been feeling the urge lately to go back to the river. I've got to. I think that maybe if I just waited there at night quietly, just quietly by myself, why, sooner or later I'd get to see the thing again. It has to be out there. Maybe I could figure out how to stop it some way.

What is it? What is the thing? I wish I knew. There's no man can say that.

It's from someplace. Someplace under the water. I know it's real. And I am sure, as I look all of it over, that this was not the first time it has come to us. Other things have been happening, over a long period of time, at Garlock's Bend. And always there's the river in the story somewhere. That's the odd part.

And no one wants to talk about any of it. It's like everybody has a story of their own, but no one is telling. Something, fear maybe, has made them stay quiet. There was even this couple whose whole house was destroyed and carried off by the water last year, with them in it. No one even mentions that one any more. Stories like that.

One day, though. Someone will put it all together. The *whole* story. Someone will figure out about the thing and settle the whole matter.

Uncle Levi has been strange to me through all of this. He seems as if he would be happier if I left him and went somewhere and lived by myself. I'm sorry about the distance that has come between us. It's as if he doesn't believe what I have said. It's as if he were on the side of the police. For me, I'm sorry now that my farm is gone, I can tell you that. I wish I had it to go live on. When he looks at me I see something unfriendly or fearful in his eyes, and it scares me. So there is no help for me from him.

I have decided that when I am just a little better settled in my mind I am going to leave him. I'll take my money and get a place to live somewhere. Maybe up from the shore some, high up on Cedar Hill.

Always I will think I could have tried harder to help Mr. Jacobs. And I feel guilty because I somehow think he did it all for me.

Something was in the water. *That* I know. Something evil and rotten. And it took away Mr. Jacobs. It's still out there, too. I will swear on my life that it's still out there. I don't know. Waiting?

All I did was tell the truth. I'd bet my life on that.

So I'm going to go to the clearing again and wait. If I'm careful, maybe I can get closer when it's not so dark and I can see the thing and maybe get an idea of what to do. Then I could get people to listen. Listen and do something. Maybe then we could get free of it.

Somebody's got to listen. Somebody *has* to.

Or in the end no one will be free of it.

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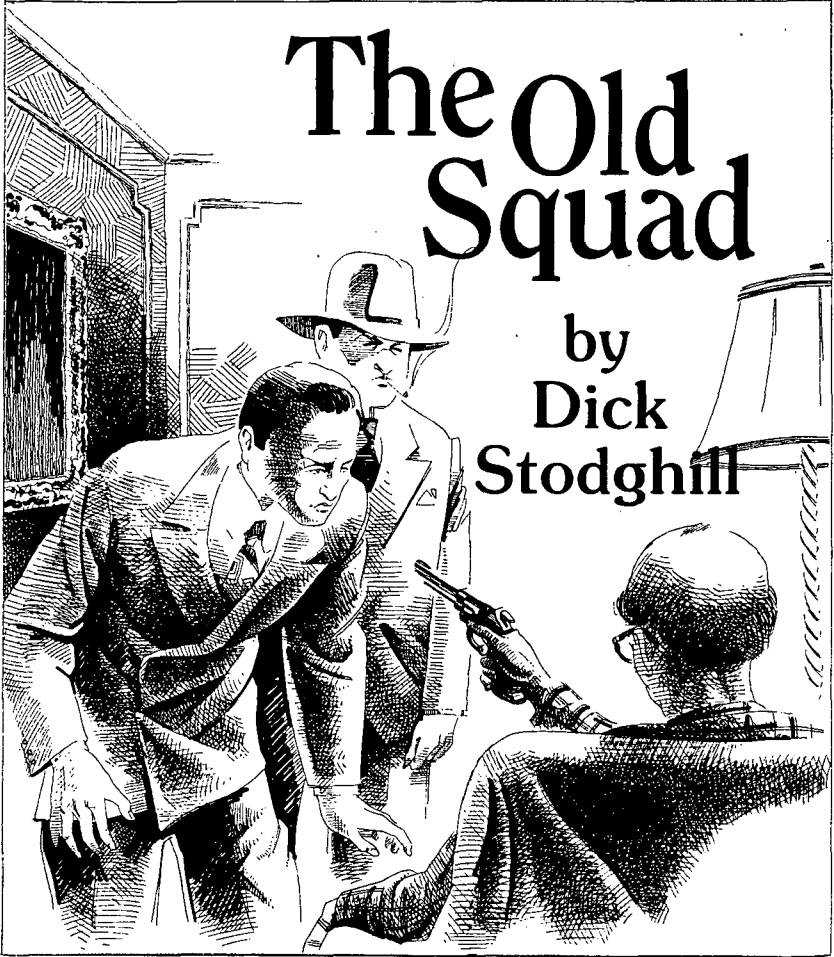
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The Old Squad

by
Dick
Stodghill



At the beginning it seemed such a hopeless venture, this delving into a year-old murder. Even at the time it aroused little interest. Had it been anyone other than Jack Eddy who tried to get me involved, I would have contrived an excuse and quickly forgotten it. But Jack had a way of drawing people into his adventures, of making them forget it was he alone who had a personal stake in the outcome.

Illustration by George Thompson

So I told him what little I recalled of the murder of John Novatny on a sidewalk in front of the Croatian-American Club, then reluctantly led him to the *Times-Press* morgue so he could read the stories clipped and filed away months earlier. There were only a few and all were short, but until he had seen them I don't think Jack himself felt any genuine interest in his assignment. Then it was a single word, "emaciated," that aroused a gleam of excitement in his eyes.

"Listen to this," he said, casting a quick glance across the table to be certain I was paying attention. "For an hour Novatny had been alone in a booth with a man no one had seen before. They had just left together when the people inside heard the shot. They described the stranger as emaciated."

I shook my head, but Jack wasn't looking. "That was my word. I wrote the story and had to find one that summed up what the witnesses told me. Skinny, half-dead looking, one foot in the grave. I couldn't say the suspect looked like a man with a foot in the grave."

Jack waved off my explanation. "You're a man of words, Bram Geary, and that's the one you came up with. So did another reporter when I was in Indianapolis a few months ago. The circumstances were nearly identical except that the body was found in a downtown hotel room. The man who occupied it, but wasn't seen again, was gaunt and haggard—emaciated."

"So what? This is the eighth year of the Depression, for God's sake. We could go anywhere in Akron, anywhere in the country for that matter, and recruit a brigade of gaunt, haggard men. You might as well say a man has two ears or a nose. The police are looking for a man with a nose."

"Very funny. Look, there's a connection. A man in my racket gets so he can feel it inside. I'm heading back to the office to do some checking. Want to tag along?"

I yawned in reply. "I'm going home, stretch out on the bed, and catch the Indians' game on radio. Anyway, didn't you tell me Wellington's National Detective Agency has a rule against people hanging around?"

Jack handed the clip file to me as he started for the exit. "That was before I was promoted to assistant manager."

At the door he looked back to where I was putting the folder away. "It's raining in Chicago, and the game's been called."

He was late for supper, a cardinal sin in the eyes of Mrs. Bauer. I was halfway through a second helping of corned beef hash when he hurried into the dining room and took his place at the long table with the family and other boarders. He pretended to be contrite while Mrs. Bauer delivered her usual scolding. I knew it by heart, this canned speech that always ended with, "I enjoy fixing wholesome meals, but if people don't appreciate them . . ."

Artie Bauer, eleven going on twelve, egged her on. "Ma, tell him about the starving children in Indiana. Go ahead, Ma."

"India, Artie, India. And I could show you children right here in Akron that could do with a decent meal."

Jack Eddy winked at the boy sitting opposite him. "Thanks for the help, Artie. Now I owe you a favor."

But his thoughts were elsewhere. He was restless, gulping his food, glancing my way between bites. Kitty Bauer, already accustomed to Jack's attention although he had been in town only a week, was piqued by the sudden lack of it. The fair Kitty glared at me as if it were my fault. I smiled at her, shrugging helplessly when Jack left the table, still chewing, and nodded for me to follow him upstairs.

We went to his room, which was larger than mine and had two chairs. Before there was time for me to settle on the most comfortable of them he said, "I was right. I called our Indianapolis branch and got the dope on the murder there. After that I sent a teletype to all thirty-three branches inquiring about murders committed by an unknown, emaciated man. A reply came in from Kansas City after I had put on my hat and was ready to come home."

He took a folded sheet of yellow paper from his jacket pocket and handed it to me. The teletype machine at the Akron branch needed a new ribbon; the printing was barely readable. The previous October, a resident of Kansas City had been found dead beside a highway two hours after leaving home with a man who had come to the door. The victim's wife said the man, whom she had never seen before and wasn't introduced to, was thin and hollow-eyed. She thought he had tuberculosis.

Jack, eager to gauge my reaction, had his eyes riveted on mine when I looked up. He said, "So now what do you think?"

I handed the paper back to him. "Your machine needs a new ribbon."

He ignored my air of nonchalance. "And I didn't tell you the name the killer registered under in Indianapolis. John Smith . . . of Akron, Ohio."

"His real name, no doubt. And he could have picked Akron out of thin air. You drew a conclusion, Jack, and now you're trying to make everything fit."

In truth, his excitement was having its effect on me. Not ready to admit it, I reached for a magazine and riffled the pages a moment before saying, "You haven't said how Wellington's enters into this."

I hadn't fooled him, he saw I was hooked. He said, "Novatny's family hired us. They aren't satisfied with what the cops have done. As far as they're concerned, it's been nothing at all."

"What do people expect, anyway? A man no one ever saw before kills somebody and then disappears without a trace. Exactly what more do they think the police might have done?"

Jack smiled in that wry way of his that could make me feel like a boy who had given a stupid answer in class. "We don't make a habit of boring people with opinions and logic when they want to hire us. We give it a shot, then if we find it's hopeless we lay it on the line. Until then we keep on trying." He paused, pulling his chair closer, leaning forward until his face was only inches from mine. "Now here's what I want you to do. I'll get everything together so you can . . ."

I was expecting him to walk into the *Times-Press* city room at noon the next day, but he fooled me. I wasn't disappointed; the plan he had outlined didn't appeal to me. Even without Jack's scheme it had been a dreary day. My top story concerned the arrest of a twenty-year-old who was driving a car that ran down a boy on Main Street. The man had been driving four years, this was the third pedestrian he had killed. Someone suggested I call the Department of Wildlife to find what the legal limit was in Ohio.

After checking out at four o'clock I drove east on Carroll Street past gaggles of coeds from the university parading in colorful spring dresses. Appreciative males lounged on every corner. The clumsy attempts at mating didn't interest me. I was too intent on hoping Jack's failure to appear meant he had run up against a stone wall.

It was a fine afternoon, too pleasant to stay indoors when I arrived at the boarding house on Dudley Street. While Mrs. Bauer was out of the kitchen, I poured a little of her Rinso into a bucket, filled it with hot water and, when I was outside again, connected

the hose and started washing the winter grime from the car. The gray Chevy, a '32 two-door sedan, was five years old and showing its age.

Artie Bauer, hurrying off toward Seiberling Field with a baseball and a cheap catcher's mitt without a pocket, paused a moment to watch as I attacked the caked-on dirt. He needed a haircut. One leg of his corduroy knickers, its elastic band stretched out of shape, drooped almost to his ankle.

"Hey," he said, sounding pleased, "look at the places where the paint's worn all the way off. Man, you better get a new car."

"Tell your mother to hold off on collecting room and board for six months and maybe I will."

He went on his way, laughing derisively. At the corner he turned to yell, "Fat chance."

From behind me Jack Eddy said, "He's right, Bram. You can't depend on a bucket of bolts like this."

I didn't look up from where I was crouched beside a wire wheel that once had been red but now was rusty brown. I said, "I didn't hear you coming," then peered up and down the street without seeing his big Auburn. "Where's your car?"

"After watching you douse everything in sight with that hose, I parked it around the corner on Laird. Come on inside, I've got a lot to tell you."

"Can't you see I'm busy? Tell me here."

He shrugged and said, "Okay," then reached for the hose and twisted the nozzle until the water stopped running. "Got another reply, this one from Boston. Two weeks ago a man was found shot dead in his apartment, a ritzy place with a doorman. He said the victim's only visitor was an undernourished man with sunken eyes. I called and had them check on hotels the night before and in an hour they found where our friend John Smith of Akron had stayed. Ditto in Kansas City."

I sighed, but softly enough that he couldn't hear. "Maybe you'd better check out all the John Smiths in town."

I hadn't meant it seriously, but he said, "What do you think I've been doing? It was a long shot, and like I figured, the name's a phony. But I'd bet a bundle this guy is really from Akron. I've got all the dope together so you can print that story tomorrow and see what happens."

"I don't know, Jack. It's pretty flimsy. Even the Novatny killing isn't much of a peg to hang it on. And if I talk the city editor into

running it, the boys down at police headquarters are going to go through the roof."

"So what? They'll get over it. If it were me I'd tip them wise ahead of time. And do it up brown, Bram. Make people start looking around to see if they've got a homicidal maniac living next door. Play up the emaciated angle and don't forget to say the agency's offering a five hundred dollar reward. But remember, only for arrest and conviction."

Seeing I was still hesitant, Jack took off his jacket and necktie and handed them to me. Then he laid his grey homburg on top. "Go inside and start writing," he said, giving me a little push. "I'll finish up here for you."

Once convinced the story linking the murders was accurate, Ben Goldsmith thought it was great. Like so many city editors, you never could be certain how Ben would react to an idea that wasn't his own. Without coming out and saying so, he made it clear he felt the quality of my work was greatly improved since Jack Eddy arrived in town. When I told him I thought we might be being used, he said that was all right at times as long as it was a two-way street.

The police didn't share his enthusiasm. The chief of detectives was incensed by what he termed "Wellington's play for publicity." He called me a muckraker, which struck me as funny, but I knew that for a while he would be feeding tips to Tom Kennedy, police reporter for the rival *Beacon Journal*. There was nothing humorous in that.

Jack didn't show up for dinner. He had learned his lesson, though, and let Mrs. Bauer know ahead of time. I was out back pitching horseshoes with her husband, Bus, when Jack arrived just before dark.

One look told me he was irritated.

"Any response to the story?" I asked, certain there had been and it wasn't what he had hoped.

"A dozen calls. All worthless. I wish you had played up the killer's description more than you did."

That remark left me as annoyed as Jack. "I used the word 'emaciated' half a dozen times. What more did you expect?"

"It's not a good word. How many rubberworkers and pretzel benders in this town know what it means? You should have said thin and sickly with sunken eyes."

I pitched a shoe ten feet beyond the stake. "Next time write it yourself."

He smiled unexpectedly, then took a horseshoe from my hand and tossed a ringer. Bus Bauer cursed under his breath. Jack said, "It was a swell story, Bram. I was just sore from chasing down dead-end leads. Forget what I said and let's amscray down to the corner for a beer. You come along, Bus."

The head of the household wasn't interested. When Jack and I were settled on barstools at the Lenox Cafe he said, "I've been thinking. We may still get something from the newspaper story, but I doubt it. What we need is a link between the victims. First thing in the morning I'm having the branches in Kansas City, Indianapolis, and Boston run detailed background checks on the dead men. With a little luck it'll give us a lead to the killer."

"The police probably beat you to the punch now that they know about the other murders."

"Not likely. But even if they have, Wellington's is better equipped to handle this sort of thing in a hurry."

"Suppose you're right and you come up with the killer's identity, when do you plan on calling in the police?"

He turned so he was facing me, looking as if he couldn't believe I had asked so dumb a question. "Call in the cops? When we walk this baby into the station house is when they'll know about it."

We left after one beer. Having missed supper, Jack was hungry but turned down my suggestion of a hotdog at the Coney Island Lunch on the opposite corner. He lectured me about caring for my digestive system as we walked down Market Street past the Norka Theater, the poolrooms, the entrance to East Akron Cemetery.

To get him off the subject I said, "How many men do you suppose spend a lifetime working across the street at Goodyear, then die and are buried within sight of Plant One? And if they lived in a house on Willard Street, they could see that, too."

Jack, suddenly cheerful again, gave me a playful punch on the arm. "Buddy, once a man is under one of those marble stones, he doesn't see a thing. But if he could, don't you think he'd like being in familiar surroundings? And don't forget, he could see the poolrooms and gin mills, too."

I didn't argue the point. We went around the corner to Grady's Restaurant on Goodyear Boulevard. Jack ordered the blue plate special.

After seeing it I felt his digestive system might have fared better at the Coney Island.

A cub reporter just promoted from copyboy was sent out on the police beat in the morning. I had an assignment more to my liking, interviewing Al Schacht. The man they called the Clown Prince of Baseball was in town to perform at the Akron Yankees' opening game with the Johnstown Johnnies. I tried to talk Goldsmith into letting me conduct the interview at League Park out by Summit Lake, but they had scheduled the story to run that day. Only the boys in the toy department would get to see the Mid-Atlantic League game that afternoon.

A message to call Jack Eddy was on my desk when I got back to the city room from talking with Schacht while he ate breakfast. Jack was excited again. "Got another for you, Bram. In Miami, last New Year's Eve. A man from Pittsburgh in town for the Orange Bowl game stumbled over the body in an alley behind his hotel. The victim had left his office a few hours earlier with a man who had come in right at quitting time. Our emaciated friend, John Smith of Akron. He had spent the previous night at the same hotel."

I don't suppose it should have shocked me, but it did. I jotted down the details for a follow-up story, then said, "Any word on those background checks?"

"Too early. I figure about the middle of the afternoon."

I called the chief of detectives so he wouldn't learn of the latest tie to the Novatny murder by reading the first edition. He seemed appreciative, but still was far short of being friendly.

After writing the story and the feature on Al Schacht, I walked north on Main Street to Wellington's office in the Metropolitan Building. It was my first visit and I expected to find a hole-in-the-wall operation. Instead it was a major enterprise with a receptionist, several clerical workers, and a number of private offices opening off a long hallway.

As a newly-appointed assistant manager, Jack Eddy had his own office. It was small and lacked a window, but I don't think Jack even noticed.

A sheet of yellow paper torn from the agency's teletype machine was on his desk. Someone had replaced the ribbon. He handed the report to me, saying, "This one got here sooner than I expected."

It was from Boston. The life story of a dead man spelled out in detail, yet as unfeeling and lifeless as the man himself. I scanned it quickly, knowing that by itself the report was meaningless. The one thing I looked for was a tie to Akron. There was none.

Then Jack gave me a second report, a background check he had

handled himself on John Novatny. "To save time," he said, "compare the military records."

The common bond between the dead men stood out boldly. From late 1917 until early 1919, both had served in the same company, same regiment of the 4th Infantry Division. Novatny had been a private, James O'Brien of Boston a sergeant.

For the first time I appreciated the capabilities of a large detective agency. Within an hour similar reports arrived from Indianapolis, Miami, Kansas City. Jack was right; Wellington's was better prepared for this sort of operation than a network of independent police departments. All the legwork had been done by men working for the same boss, all the man-hours charged to the Akron branch and eventually its client.

Being there as each new report corroborated the others was exhilarating, but when all were in and the initial excitement had dissipated, I experienced a letdown. Jack, busy with the phone book, obviously didn't share my mood.

"What now?" I asked him. "How do we find the sixth man?"

Rather than answering, he reached for the telephone, then drummed his fingers on the desk while waiting in vain for someone to come on the line. While dialing a second number he said, "No one home at Novatnys'."

After asking a question and getting an answer he said, "Good," then jumped up and put on his hat. "The library has the history of the 4th Division in the World War. Let's go."

We walked north to Market Street, then around the corner past the Taylor Hotel with NO LIQUOR lettered on its front window. In 1937 that narrowed the list of prospective guests considerably. The library was half a block east.

The book wasn't much help. Aside from high-ranking officers, only those men who had died in France were listed. Hometowns weren't mentioned. Jack left me there to compare the names of the thirty-five G Company men who had been killed with those in the 1917 city directory. I resented it a little, being ordered around as if I were an agency employee. Even so, I was anxious to see the result and set to work.

An hour later he hurried in again, even more exuberant than usual, and told me to forget it for the time being.

"I finally got John Novatny's brother on the phone," he said. "He remembered an Akron man who was in the army with his brother. I called the guy's house and he's working afternoon shift at American Hard Rubber. He won't be home before seven o'clock

so we'll have to wait till then to see him."

I looked to where a clock was mounted on the far wall. "We couldn't go now, anyway. If we did we'd miss supper."

Jack pretended to be dismayed. "God forbid missing supper. Not just to catch a mass murderer."

He laughed, then, and so did I, even though it was a serious matter. Mrs. Bauer would take just so much.

Jack was surprisingly relaxed during the meal. But when Kitty Bauer, looking her prettiest, said, "There's a good show at the Rialto tonight," he let it pass without comment. After mentioning it was a Gable movie and still arousing no response from Jack, she turned and frowned at me.

We left in the Auburn soon after dinner. I was hoping Jack would offer to let me drive the powerful sedan, but he didn't. I showed him the short route to North Hill: down through the valley at Old Forge and up the steep incline on Dan Street. I could tell he was fixing it in his memory. That was something I had learned in the short time he had been in town, Jack Eddy never forgot anything.

The man, Guido Sardi, was waiting for us when we arrived at his bungalow on Big Falls Avenue. The neighborhood, like much of North Hill, was home to many first and second generation Italian families. Sardi was second generation, a husky man with the features and mannerisms of his forebears. He definitely wasn't our emaciated killer.

"Sure I knew Novatny," he said in answer to Jack's first question. "We were buddies in high school. Hadn't seen him for years but I can't figure it, anybody wanting to knock off a swell guy like John."

"You were with him in the army, right?"

"Yeah, we joined up together. They sent us to the Ivy Division at Camp Greene outside Charlotte, North Carolina. That's what we called the 4th, the Ivy Division, on account of the Roman numeral for four. The shoulder patch was four green ivy leaves. Anyway, we stayed in the same rifle squad through training and then when we shipped out to France. Made it back, too, and let me tell you we saw some hot times over there. The Aisne offensive, St. Mihiel, then the Argonne."

"You were together all through it?"

Sardi cleared his throat, darting his eyes around in a way that made me suspect his answer would be evasive. "Just about the whole way except a couple of times I got sick. Now Stanton, he wasn't so lucky. He copped it bad at Sergy."

Jack had edged forward on his chair. "Stanton?"

"Yeah, he joined up at the same time. Right out of high school, all of us. Johnnie Stanton. We always called him that because there were two Johns and . . . well, you know. Poor old Johnnie, he didn't come back home with Novatny and me."

"He was killed?"

"No, no. Torn up real bad, though. Like I said, at Sergy up north of Chateau-Thierry. Never did get out of VA hospitals. Last I heard he was in one over at Marion, Indiana. Always meant to pay him a visit but . . . well, you know how it goes."

"Does he still have family in Akron?"

A frown darkened Sardi's already dark features. "How come you're so interested in Johnnie Stanton?"

Jack smiled, running a hand over his sandy hair, leaning back in his chair again as if it didn't matter. "Just filling in the blank spaces, that's all. Does he?"

Sardi studied him suspiciously a moment, then shrugged one shoulder, also as if it didn't matter. "Last I knew, his father still lived in the old neighborhood down on Upson Street. I remember seeing in the paper about his mother dying a few years back, and Johnnie was an only child."

Walking to the car I realized I hadn't said a word except hello and goodbye. I'm sure Jack preferred it that way. At the curb I said, "Let me drive," so he tossed the keys to me. His mind was so busy I don't believe he even thought about what he was doing.

I fell in love with that Auburn before we had gone a block. It made me feel bigger, more important, powerful. I took the long way around, crossing the North Hill Viaduct high above the valley of the Little Cuyahoga River. Downtown Akron began with an Ohio Edison sign that towered over its southern end. Neither of us spoke until we left the bridge; Jack's thoughts being on the case, mine on the car. Then he said, "Stop at the office. I'm going to phone Marion."

He did, but was told to call back in the morning when the hospital's office staff would be working. That didn't make him happy, but there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

The phone book didn't list a Stanton on Upson Street so we hurried back to the library, arriving five minutes before closing time. Jack found the address in the latest city directory, then verified it was the same as that in the directory published twenty years earlier.

Upson Street was on our way home. It was a neighborhood of

large, unpretentious houses, many of them showing signs of neglect. The Stanton place a block east of City Hospital was in the worst condition of all. No lights burned inside. At first glance it appeared abandoned, but we knew it wasn't.

We didn't stop. I thought Jack would want to and was prepared to argue against it. For the first time I realized that while he was always eager, always intent on what he was doing, he rarely was reckless or impulsive. Like any capable strategist or tactician, he didn't enjoy surprises.

Bus Bauer came out on the porch, a section of newspaper trailing from one hand, when he heard the car. In the pale light of a sixty-watt bulb his pasty complexion was ghastly to behold. From beside the car I called, "What's wrong, Bus?"

"Somebody just phoned from the paper. They want you there right away, Bram. They're getting out an extra."

"What's happened?"

"Ain't you heard? The *Hindenburg* went down in flames."

I was weary and depressed in the morning. Not only from working much of the night but because the fiery end of the German airship was a bitter blow to Akron. Plans to build two more dirigibles at the mammoth hanger at the airport had been under discussion. Now everyone knew it would never happen. The *Shenandoah*, the *Akron*, the *Macon*, and now the *Hindenburg*; no one would ever trust dirigibles again. Using helium rather than flammable hydrogen to keep them aloft wouldn't help. The three American airships had used helium.

But I learned that Jack Eddy was a considerate man, provided that being so was convenient for him. Rather than going to the Stanton house alone in the morning, he waited until my stories were written and filed.

"Johnnie Stanton," he told me as we drove to Upson Street, "was discharged from the hospital late last June. First time in eighteen years they let him out on his own. I asked in the neighborhood and he's been seen at the house."

"Late June—the timing is right. Did they say what was wrong with him?"

"The doctor I talked to said it was confidential, but finally told me Stanton suffered severe gastrointestinal wounds in the war. I did some checking with other people in Marion. A high percentage of the patients there have mental problems."

As we waited while an ambulance turned off Upson Street into

the emergency room drive at City Hospital, I said, "Did you bring a gun?"

Jack shook his head. Then when we were getting out of the car he said, "I wouldn't want to shoot the man."

Several uncomfortable minutes went by before there was a response to his loud knocking on the door. All that time I felt we were being watched, sized up by someone hidden behind curtains or the long, faded drapes at the first floor windows.

Jack gave our names when the door finally opened a few inches, but didn't explain who we were or why we were there. Instead he said, "May we talk to you inside, Mr. Stanton?"

The man, who until then had peered at us from the narrow opening, stepped back to allow us to enter. He led us into a musty-smelling parlor crowded with dusty knickknacks on faded doilies. Bulky furniture of the type popular early in the century left little room for moving about. Each of the three lamps had a shade of leaded stained glass. It wasn't until Jack and I were seated on a couch and the man had eased himself onto a chair facing us that I realized this was Johnnie Stanton, not his father. He looked more like a dying man of eighty than someone half that age.

His unblinking eyes remained fixed on Jack. They were exceptionally pale, grey or light blue, and set far back in clearly defined skeletal sockets. I was fascinated by those eyes, so round and large for a face that seemed to have nothing at all between its waxy skin and the skull.

He hadn't spoken until then, not even at the door, so I was shocked by the depth and timbre of his voice when he said, "Are you from the police?"

I had been prepared for a tense session of accusations and denials. Instead it seemed he had been expecting us. Jack said, "I'm from Wellington's National Detective Agency, Mr. Stanton, and Mr. Geary is with the *Times-Press*. We know the whole story except why you killed five men."

Stanton turned for a moment so he was facing me, smiling grotesquely at learning I was a newspaperman. Then he looked again at Jack. He said, "They left me lying there."

Jack waited for more. I became aware of the ticking of a clock standing in a corner near a fireplace and, when I glanced toward it, the slow, rhythmic swinging of its pendulum. Only when Jack said, "At Sergy?" did I turn back to them.

Stanton was slow to reply. When he did speak, the story unfolded

without interruption. I was drawn steadily into it until it seemed I was there on that July morning in 1918.

"On the road to Fere-en-Tardenois near Sergy," he began. "We had started out on a side road several miles from where they were fighting at the edge of town. The 2nd Battalion was to go to the main road, then wheel to the east and take up a position on the left flank. We moved out one company at a time. G Company—mine—was third in line, and our squad was on the point.

"We got the order to move out ten minutes after E Company passed our bivouac area. A column on each side of the road, fifteen feet between men. I was first man in the column on the right. It was simple enough, no chance for a mistake. The only danger was from airplanes or artillery, but the Germans were concentrating their fire at the edge of Sergy. We had seen a few Fokkers in the distance, but they seemed too busy to have time for us. We weren't worried about the march, only about what we'd get into when it ended.

"We turned right toward Sergy when we got to the main highway. Fifty yards ahead there was underbrush like that beside the roads, so I thought there must be an abrupt curve. They hadn't told us that, though, so I wondered a little. Joe Gates, the man out front on the left, looked over his shoulder at me like he was wondering too. But we kept going.

"We were halfway there when I suddenly realized something was wrong. At that same instant Jim O'Brien, our squad leader, yelled, 'Watch out, it's a roadblock!'

"Somehow the Germans had infiltrated our lines and put it up in that ten minute interval. I was starting for the ground when I was hit. It was like being struck by a ball bat. Fast, one time after another. It straightened me up again and knocked me over backward. I ended up sitting down, not feeling anything, just stunned, hearing the machine gun but as though it was a long way off. And I saw Joe Gates get it the way slow motion looks in a picture show—rising up off the ground, his helmet flying off. I could tell by the way he came down and lay there sprawled out that he was dead.

"Then the pain hit. It was like nothing I ever felt before, like my stomach was on fire but even worse than that. I fell over on my back and heard somebody screaming and knew it was me. I managed to turn my head enough to see behind me. I saw O'Brien crawling in the ditch, going back the way we had come and yelling,

'Get back, get back!' I saw John Novatny, my buddy, and he was going the other way too.

"I yelled for them to help me, but they kept going. Then I guess I passed out for a minute or two. When I woke up again, Germans were running by me. I remember raising my hand and asking for help. One of them looked down and smiled and shook his head. After that I heard rifle fire somewhere behind me, then I passed out again.

"When I came to, I was lying on a stretcher in a building. The pain was bad, but not as severe as before. Far off in the distance I could hear rumbling like thunder, so I knew I was well back of the front. I raised up enough to see my uniform had been cut away and there were bandages from my groin to my chest. Then a man came over and knelt beside me. He held his cigarette to my lips so I could take a puff, then said something to me in German.

"That's when I knew where I was. And I knew that my friends in the squad had run off and left me there on the road, but when the Germans came back, they had taken me along and helped me. Right then was when I decided what I'd do some day."

For a moment or so the only sound was the steady ticking of the clock, then Jack said, "What about Guido Sardi?"

Stanton's laugh was terse and scornful. "He wasn't there. He managed to get sick before we moved up, the way he had at Hill 184. He was back in a hospital. Me, I was in one in Germany until December. Finally, a month after the war was over, the Americans arrived. The Germans had done everything they could for me, but they didn't have enough doctors or supplies to properly care for their own men.

"When I was back in the States the doctors told me they might have been able to do more for me if they had worked on me right away, but as it was, well . . .

"And somehow they got the idea I was batty. I could have walked away from the place, but I bided my time. Kept busy keeping track of the boys without them knowing it. Three were dead, though. One at Bazoches, two in the Argonne."

Jack eased forward to the edge of the couch. "It's over now, Johnnie. You'll have to come with us to the police."

Stanton began shaking his head. "No, I don't want to do that."

When his right hand came up from the cushion of his chair it held a pistol, a huge Colt .45 capable of knocking a man halfway across a room. He said, "You gentlemen will have to leave now."

I was ready, but Jack, rising to his feet, said, "No, Johnnie. You have to come with us."

Stanton's head had never stopped its slow back and forth movement. "I told you, no. I'll kill you if I have to."

Jack took a step toward him. "No, you won't, Johnnie. We weren't at Sergy."

He laid his hand on the long barrel of the .45, not even bothering to turn it away so it wasn't aimed at his midsection. I was vaguely aware of having stopped breathing. Then, and nothing could have surprised me more, Stanton released his hold on the gun. He looked from Jack to me, then down at the floor. "No," he said, almost to himself, "you weren't there."

His words came back as I typed the story for the final edition. I changed it from first to third person; that was all. People said it was the best I had written. That meant nothing to me, but passing Johnnie Stanton's ordeal on to others left me with an inner satisfaction I hadn't experienced before. I couldn't have explained why, though, had anyone asked.

Jack Eddy, in town only two weeks, was already a celebrity thanks to having me tagging along at his side. And not only in Akron because the wire services had jumped on my story. It probably ran in most of the papers in the country, perhaps in the world.

That evening Jack and Kitty Bauer went off somewhere, hand in hand and laughing as they hurried down the porch steps and on to the Auburn. When they had gone I walked to the Lenox Cafe, stopping a moment along the way to talk to Paul Bauer, the second of Bus and Ivy Bauer's three children.

He was wearing a baggy grey baseball uniform with EAST printed in scarlet letters across the chest. Paul was down in the dumps; the East High Orientals had defeated Kenmore, but he had gone hitless and committed two errors. For one foolish moment I considered reminding him that the next game would offer another opportunity, then better judgment prevailed.

He walked on toward home, head drooping in despair. I went on to the Lenox. The promise of rain was in the air and with it the smell of rubber, acrid and noxious even to someone so accustomed to it that normally it went unnoticed.

They were talking of McNair's error on Earl Averill's ground ball that opened the gates for the Indians to rally and beat the Red Sox. Usually I would have joined the conversation, but that night

it seemed unimportant. I sat alone at the end of the bar, nodding when someone spoke, wondering where Jack had taken Kitty, what they were doing.

It was close to midnight when he came in. I didn't ask the questions in my mind, instead saying, "I was thinking about Johnnie Stanton. It's stupid, I guess, but I hate the idea of his spending the rest of his life at Lima."

Jack didn't understand. He repeated, "Lima?"

"The state hospital for the criminally insane. That's where they'll send him."

"No, they won't. Didn't I tell you, the doc at Marion said he was dying. He won't be going anywhere. If that hadn't been the case, if I hadn't thought he'd be better off in jail, then I'm not sure . . ."

"Not sure of what?"

"I don't know. Forget it." He swung around so he was facing me, suddenly his enthusiastic self again, and slapped me on the back. "You know what I forgot? I forgot to tell you I turned in your name for the five hundred dollar reward."

"You can forget that too, Jack. The paper wouldn't let me accept it. Anyway, I wouldn't want to."

He nodded for the bartender, holding up two fingers. "Okay. Whatever you say, but you deserve it. At least I can buy you another beer without the *Times-Press* getting its nose out of joint."

I lingered a while after he left, wondering what he had been going to say before thinking better of it. The first drops of rain were splattering in dark circles on the sidewalk when I started home. Within seconds it became a downpour, but I didn't hurry. It was a long time later that I learned Jack Eddy had received a five hundred dollar bonus from the agency for his work on the John Novatny case.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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Me-how? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 139.

FICTION



The Case of the Andromache Pietro

by Sara Paretsky

“**Y**ou only agreed to hire him because of his art collection. Of that I’m sure.” Lotty Herschel bent down to adjust her stockings. “And don’t waggle your eyebrows like that—it makes you look like an

adolescent Groucho Marx.”

Max Loewenthal obediently smoothed his eyebrows, but said, “It’s your legs, Lotty; they remind me of my youth. You know, going into the Underground to wait out the air raids, looking at the ladies as they

came down the escalators. The updraft always made their skirts billow."

"You're making this up, Max. I was in those Underground stations, too, and as I remember the ladies were always bundled in coats and children."

Max moved from the doorway to put an arm around Lotty. "That's what keeps us together, *Lottchen*: I am a romantic and you are severely logical. And you know we didn't hire Caudwell because of his collection. Although I admit I am eager to see it. The board wants Beth Israel to develop a transplant program. It's the only way we're going to become competitive—"

"Don't deliver your publicity lecture to me," Lotty snapped. Her thick brows contracted to a solid black line across her forehead. "As far as I am concerned he is a cretin with the hands of a Caliban and the personality of Attila."

Lotty's intense commitment to medicine left no room for the mundane consideration of money. But as the hospital's executive director, Max was on the spot with the trustees to see that Beth Israel ran at a profit. Or at least at a smaller loss than they'd achieved in recent years. They'd brought Caudwell in part to attract more paying patients—and to help screen out some of the indigent who made up twelve percent of Beth

Israel's patient load. Max wondered how long the hospital could afford to support personalities as divergent as Lotty and Caudwell with their radically differing approaches to medicine.

He dropped his arm and smiled quizzically at her. "Why do you hate him so much, Lotty?"

"I am the person who has to justify the patients I admit to this—this troglodyte. Do you realize he tried to keep Mrs. Mendes from the operating room when he learned she had AIDS? He wasn't even being asked to sully his hands with her blood and he didn't want me performing surgery on her."

Lotty drew back from Max and pointed an accusing finger at him. "You may tell the board that if he keeps questioning my judgment they will find themselves looking for a new perinatologist. I am serious about this. You listen this afternoon, Max, you hear whether or not he calls me 'our little baby doctor.' I am fifty-eight years old, I am a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons besides having enough credentials in this country to support a whole hospital, and to him I am a 'little baby doctor.'"

Max sat on the daybed and pulled Lotty down next to him. "No, no, *Lottchen*: don't fight. Listen to me. Why haven't you told me any of this before?"

"Don't be an idiot, Max: you are the director of the hospital. I cannot use our special relationship to deal with problems I have with the staff. I said my piece when Caudwell came for his final interview. A number of the other physicians were not happy with his attitude. If you remember, we asked the board to bring him in as a cardiac surgeon first and promote him to chief of staff after a year if everyone was satisfied with his performance."

"We talked about doing it that way," Max admitted. "But he wouldn't take the appointment except as chief of staff. That was the only way we could offer him the kind of money he could get at one of the university hospitals or Humana. And, Lotty, even if you don't like his personality you must agree that he is a first-class surgeon."

"I agree to nothing." Red lights danced in her black eyes. "If he patronizes me, a fellow physician, how do you imagine he treats his patients? You cannot practice medicine if—"

"Now it's my turn to ask to be spared a lecture," Max interrupted gently. "But if you feel so strongly about him, maybe you shouldn't go to his party this afternoon."

"And admit that he can beat me? Never."

"Very well then." Max got up and placed a heavily brocaded

wool shawl over Lotty's shoulders. "But you must promise me to behave. This is a social function we are going to, remember, not a gladiator contest. Caudwell is trying to repay some hospitality this afternoon, not to belittle you."

"I don't need lessons in conduct from you: Herschels were attending the emperors of Austria while the Loewenthals were operating vegetable stalls on the Ring," Lotty said haughtily.

Max laughed and kissed her hand. "Then remember these regal Herschels and act like them, *Eure Hoheit*."

II

Caudwell had bought an apartment sight unseen when he moved to Chicago. A divorced man whose children are in college only has to consult with his own taste in these matters. He asked the Beth Israel board to recommend a realtor, sent his requirements to them—twenties construction, near Lake Michigan, good security, modern plumbing—and dropped seven hundred and fifty thousand for an eight-room condo facing the lake at Scott Street.

Since Beth Israel paid handsomely for the privilege of retaining Dr. Charlotte Herschel as their perinatologist, nothing

required her to live in a five room walkup on the fringes of Uptown, so it was a bit unfair of her to mutter "Parvenu" to Max when they walked into the lobby.

Max relinquished Lotty gratefully when they got off the elevator. Being her lover was like trying to be companion to a Bengal tiger: you never knew when she'd take a lethal swipe at you. Still, if Caudwell were insulting her—and her judgment—maybe he needed to talk to the surgeon, explain how important Lotty was for the reputation of Beth Israel.

Caudwell's two children were making the obligatory Christmas visit. They were a boy and a girl, Deborah and Steve, within a year of the same age, both tall, both blond and poised, with a hearty sophistication born of a childhood spent on expensive ski slopes. Max wasn't very big, and as one took his coat and the other performed brisk introductions, he felt himself shrinking, losing in self-assurance. He accepted a glass of special *cuvée* from one of them—was it the boy or the girl, he wondered in confusion—and fled into the melee.

He landed next to one of Beth Israel's trustees, a woman in her sixties wearing a grey textured mini-dress whose black stripes were constructed of feathers. She commented

brightly on Caudwell's art collection, but Max sensed an undercurrent of hostility: wealthy trustees don't like the idea that they can't out-buy the staff.

While he was frowning and nodding at appropriate intervals, it dawned on Max that Caudwell did know how much the hospital needed Lotty. Heart surgeons do not have the world's smallest egos: when you ask them to name the world's three leading practitioners, they never can remember the names of the other two. Lotty was at the top of her field, and she, too, was used to having things her way. Since her confrontational style was reminiscent more of the Battle of the Bulge than the Imperial Court of Vienna, he didn't blame Caudwell for trying to force her out of the hospital.

Max moved away from Martha Gildersleeve to admire some of the paintings and figurines she'd been discussing. A collector himself of Chinese porcelains, Max raised his eyebrows and mouthed a soundless whistle at the pieces on display. A small Watteau and a Charles Demuth watercolor were worth as much as Beth Israel paid Caudwell in a year. No wonder Mrs. Gildersleeve had been so annoyed.

"Impressive, isn't it."

Max turned to see Arthur Gioia looming over him. Max was shorter than most of the

Beth Israel staff, shorter than everyone but Lotty. But Gioia, a tall muscular immunologist, loomed over everyone. He had gone to the University of Arkansas on a football scholarship and had even spent a season playing tackle for Houston before starting medical school. It had been twenty years since he last lifted weights, but his neck still looked like a redwood stump.

Gioia had led the opposition to Caudwell's appointment. Max had suspected at the time that it was due more to a medicine man's not wanting a surgeon as his nominal boss than from any other cause, but after Lotty's outburst he wasn't so sure. He was debating whether to ask the doctor how he felt about Caudwell now that he'd worked with him for six months when their host surged over to him and shook his hand.

"Sorry I didn't see you when you came in, Loewenthal. You like the Watteau? It's one of my favorite pieces. Although a collector shouldn't play favorites any more than a father should, eh, sweetheart?" The last remark was addressed to the daughter, Deborah, who had come up behind Caudwell and slipped an arm around him.

Caudwell looked more like a Victorian seadog than a surgeon. He had a round red face under a shock of yellow-white

hair, a hearty Santa Claus laugh, and a bluff, direct manner. Despite Lotty's vituperations, he was immensely popular with his patients. In the short time he'd been at the hospital, referrals to cardiac surgery had increased fifteen percent.

His daughter squeezed his shoulder playfully. "I know you don't play favorites with us, Dad, but you're lying to Mr. Loewenthal about your collection; come on, you know you are."

She turned to Max. "He has a piece he's so proud of he doesn't like to show it to people—he doesn't want them to see he's got vulnerable spots. But it's Christmas, Dad, relax, let people see how you feel for a change."

Max looked curiously at the surgeon, but Caudwell seemed pleased with his daughter's familiarity. The son came up and added his own jocular cajoling.

"This really is Dad's pride and joy. He stole it from Uncle Griffen when Grandfather died and kept Mother from getting her mitts on it when they split up."

Caudwell did bark out a mild reproof at that. "You'll be giving my colleagues the wrong impression of me, Steve. I didn't steal it from Grif. Told him he could have the rest of the estate if he'd leave me the Watteau and the Pietro."

"Of course he could've bought ten estates with what those two would fetch," Steve muttered to his sister over Max's head.

Deborah relinquished her father's arm to lean over Max and whisper back, "Mom, too."

Max moved away from the alarming pair to say to Caudwell, "A Pietro? You mean Pietro d'Alessandro? You have a model, or an actual sculpture?"

Caudwell gave his staccato admiral's laugh. "The real McCoy, Loewenthal. The real McCoy. An alabaster."

"An alabaster?" Max raised his eyebrows. "Surely not. I thought Pietro worked only in bronze and marble."

"Yes, yes," chuckled Caudwell, rubbing his hands together. "Everyone thinks so, but there were a few alabasters in private collections. I've had this one authenticated by experts. Come take a look at it—it'll knock your breath away. You come, too, Gioia," he barked at the immunologist. "You're Italian, you'll like to see what your ancestors were up to."

"A Pietro alabaster?" Lotty's clipped tones made Max start—he hadn't noticed her joining the little group. "I would very much like to see this piece."

"Then come along, Dr. Herschel, come along." Caudwell led them to a small hallway, exchanging genial greetings with his guests as he passed.

pointing out a John William Hill miniature they might not have seen, picking up a few other people who for various reasons wanted to see his prize.

"By the way, Gioia, I was in New York last week, you know. Met an old friend of yours from Arkansas. Paul Nierman."

"Nierman?" Gioia seemed to be at a loss. "I'm afraid I don't remember him."

"Well, he remembered you pretty well. Sent you all kinds of messages—you'll have to stop by my office on Monday and get the full strength."

Caudwell opened a door on the right side of the hall and let them into his study. It was an octagonal room carved out of the corner of the building. Windows on two sides looked out on Lake Michigan. Caudwell drew salmon drapes as he talked about the room, why he'd chosen it for his study even though the view kept his mind from his work.

Lotty ignored him and walked over to a small pedestal which stood alone against the paneling on one of the far walls. Max followed her and gazed respectfully at the statue. He had seldom seen so fine a piece outside a museum. About a foot high, it depicted a woman in classical draperies hovering in anguish over the dead body of a soldier lying at her feet. The grief in her beautiful face was so poi-

gnant that it reminded you of every sorrow you had ever faced.

"Who is it meant to be?" Max asked curiously.

"Andromache," Lotty said in a strangled voice. "Andromache mourning Hector."

Max stared at Lotty, astonished equally by her emotion and her knowledge of the figure—Lotty was totally uninterested in sculpture.

Caudwell couldn't restrain the smug smile of a collector with a true coup. "Beautiful, isn't it? How do you know the subject?"

"I should know it." Lotty's voice was husky with emotion. "My grandmother had such a Pietro. An alabaster given her great-grandfather by the Emperor Joseph the Second himself for his help in consolidating imperial ties with Poland."

She swept the statue from its stand, ignoring a gasp from Max, and turned it over. "You can see the traces of the imperial stamp here still. And the chip on Hector's foot which made the Hapsburg wish to give the statue away to begin with. How came you to have this piece? Where did you find it?"

The small group that had joined Caudwell stood silent by the entrance, shocked at Lotty's outburst. Gioia looked more horrified than any of them, but he found Lotty overwhelming at the best of times—an ele-

phant confronted by a hostile mouse.

"I think you're allowing your emotions to carry you away, doctor." Caudwell kept his tone light, making Lotty seem more gauche by contrast. "I inherited this piece from my father, who bought it—legitimately—in Europe. Perhaps from your—grandmother, was it? But I suspect you are confused about something you may have seen in a museum as a child."

Deborah gave a high-pitched laugh and called loudly to her brother, "Dad may have stolen it from Uncle Grif, but it looks like Grandfather snatched it to begin with anyway."

"Be quiet, Deborah," Caudwell barked sternly.

His daughter paid no attention to him. She laughed again and joined her brother to look at the imperial seal on the bottom of the statue.

Lotty brushed them aside. "I am confused about the seal of Joseph the Second?" she hissed at Caudwell. "Or about this chip on Hector's foot? You can see the line where some Philistine filled in the missing piece. Some person who thought his touch would add value to Pietro's work. Was that you, doctor? Or your father?"

"Lotty." Max was at her side, gently prising the statue from her shaking hands to restore it to its pedestal. "Lotty, this is

not the place or the manner to discuss such things."

Angry tears sparkled in her black eyes. "Are you doubting my word?"

Max shook his head. "I'm not doubting you. But I'm also not supporting you. I'm asking you not to talk about this matter in this way at this gathering."

"But, Max: either this man or his father is a thief!"

Caudwell strolled up to Lotty and pinched her chin. "You're working too hard, Dr. Herschel. You have too many things on your mind these days. I think the board would like to see you take a leave of absence for a few weeks, go someplace warm, get yourself relaxed. When you're this tense, you're no good to your patients. What do you say, Loewenthal?"

Max didn't say any of the things he wanted to—that Lotty was insufferable and Caudwell intolerable. He believed Lotty, believed that the piece had been her grandmother's. She knew too much about it, for one thing. And for another, a lot of artworks belonging to European Jews were now in museums or private collections around the world. It was only the most god-awful coincidence that the Pietro had ended up with Caudwell's father.

But how dare she raise the matter in the way most likely to alienate everyone present?

He couldn't possibly support her in such a situation. And at the same time, Caudwell's pinching her chin in that condescending way made him wish he were not chained to a courtesy that would have kept him from knocking the surgeon out even if he'd been ten years younger and ten inches taller.

"I don't think this is the place or the time to discuss such matters," he reiterated as calmly as he could. "Why don't we all cool down and get back together on Monday, eh?"

Lotty gasped involuntarily, then swept from the room without a backward glance.

Max refused to follow her. He was too angry with her to want to see her again that afternoon. When he got ready to leave the party an hour or so later, after a long conversation with Caudwell that taxed his sophisticated urbanity to the utmost, he heard with relief that Lotty was long gone. The tale of her outburst had of course spread through the gathering at something faster than the speed of sound; he wasn't up to defending her to Martha Gildersleeve who demanded an explanation of him in the elevator going down.

He went home for a solitary evening in his house in Evanston. Normally such time brought him pleasure, listening to music in his study, lying on the

couch with his shoes off, reading history, letting the sounds of the lake wash over him.

Tonight, though, he could get no relief. Fury with Lotty merged into images of horror, the memories of his own disintegrated family, his search through Europe for his mother. He had never found anyone who was quite certain what became of her, although several people told him definitely of his father's suicide. And stamped over these wisps in his brain was the disturbing picture of Caudwell's children, their blond heads leaning backward at identical angles as they gleefully chanted, "Grandpa was a thief, Grandpa was a thief," while Caudwell edged his visitors out of the study.

By morning he would somehow have to reconstruct himself enough to face Lotty, to respond to the inevitable flood of calls from outraged trustees. He'd have to figure out a way of soothing Caudwell's vanity, bruised more by his children's behavior than anything Lotty had said. And find a way to keep both important doctors at Beth Israel.

Max rubbed his grey hair. Every week this job brought him less joy and more pain. Maybe it was time to step down, to let the board bring in a young MBA who would turn Beth Israel's finances around. Lotty

would resign then, and it would be an end to the tension between her and Caudwell.

Max fell asleep on the couch. He awoke around five muttering, "By morning, by morning." His joints were stiff from cold, his eyes sticky with tears he'd shed unknowingly in his sleep.

But in the morning things changed. When Max got to his office he found the place buzzing, not with news of Lotty's outburst but word that Caudwell had missed his early morning surgery. Work came almost completely to a halt at noon when his children phoned to say they'd found the surgeon strangled in his own study and the Pietro Andromache missing. And on Tuesday, the police arrested Dr. Charlotte Herschel for Lewis Caudwell's murder.

III

Lotty would not speak to anyone. She was out on two hundred fifty thousand dollars' bail, the money raised by Max, but she had gone directly to her apartment on Sheffield after two nights in County Jail without stopping to thank him. She would not talk to reporters, she remained silent during all conversations with the police, and she emphatically refused to speak to the private investiga-

tor who had been her close friend for many years.

Max, too, stayed behind an impregnable shield of silence. While Lotty went on indefinite leave, turning her practice over to a series of colleagues, Max continued to go to the hospital every day. But he, too, would not speak to reporters: he wouldn't even say, "No comment." He talked to the police only after they threatened to lock him up as a material witness, and then every word had to be pried from him as if his mouth were stone and speech Excalibur. For three days V. I. Warshawski left messages which he refused to return.

On Friday, when no word came from the detective, when no reporter popped up from a nearby urinal in the men's room to try to trick him into speaking, when no more calls came from the state's attorney, Max felt a measure of relaxation as he drove home. As soon as the trial was over he would resign, retire to London. If he could only keep going until then, everything would be—not all right, but bearable.

He used the remote release for the garage door and eased his car into the small space. As he got out he realized bitterly he'd been too optimistic in thinking he'd be left in peace. He hadn't seen the woman sitting on the stoop leading from

the garage to the kitchen when he drove in, only as she uncoiled herself at his approach.

"I'm glad you're home—I was beginning to freeze out here."

"How did you get into the garage, Victoria?"

The detective grinned in a way he usually found engaging. Now it seemed merely predatory. "Trade secret, Max. I know you don't want to see me, but I need to talk to you."

He unlocked the door into the kitchen. "Why not just let yourself into the house if you were cold? If your scruples permit you into the garage, why not into the house?"

She bit her lip in momentary discomfort but said lightly, "I couldn't manage my picklocks with my fingers this cold."

The detective followed him into the house. Another tall monster; five foot eight, athletic, light on her feet behind him. Maybe American mothers put growth hormones or steroids in their children's cornflakes. He'd have to ask Lotty. His mind winced at the thought.

"I've talked to the police, of course," the light alto continued behind him steadily, oblivious to his studied rudeness as he poured himself a cognac, took his shoes off, found his waiting slippers, and padded down the hall to the front door for his mail.

"I understand why they ar-

rested Lotty—Caudwell had been doped with a whole bunch of Xanax and then strangled while he was sleeping it off. And, of course, she was back at the building Sunday night. She won't say why, but one of the tenants I.D.'d her as the woman who showed up around ten at the service entrance when he was walking his dog. She won't say if she talked to Caudwell, if he let her in, if he was still alive."

Max tried to ignore her clear voice. When that proved impossible he tried to read a journal which had come in the mail.

"And those kids, they're marvelous, aren't they? Like something out of the *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*. They won't talk to me but they gave a long interview to Murray Ryerson over at the *Star*."

"After Caudwell's guests left, they went to a flick at the Chestnut Street Station, had a pizza afterwards, then took themselves dancing on Division Street. So they strolled in around two in the morning—confirmed by the doorman—saw the light on in the old man's study. But they were feeling no pain and he kind of overreacted—their term—if they were buzzed, so they didn't stop in to say good-night. It was only when they got up around noon and went in that they found him."

V. I. had followed Max from the Mounties searched Hugo's

the front hallway to the door of his study as she spoke. He stood there irresolutely, not wanting his private place desecrated with her insistent, air-hammer speech, and finally went on down the hall to a little-used living room. He sat stiffly on one of the brocade armchairs and looked at her remotely when she perched on the edge of its companion.

"The weak piece in the police story is the statue," V. I. continued.

She eyed the Persian rug doubtfully and unzipped her boots, sticking them on the bricks in front of the fireplace.

"Everyone who was at the party agrees that Lotty was beside herself. By now the story has spread so far that people who weren't even in the apartment when she looked at the statue swear they heard her threaten to kill him. But if that's the case, what happened to the statue?"

Max gave a slight shrug to indicate total lack of interest in the topic.

V. I. ploughed on doggedly. "Now some people think she might have given it to a friend or a relation to keep for her until her name is cleared at the trial. And these people think it would be either her Uncle Stefan here in Chicago, her brother Hugo in Montreal, or you. So

place and are keeping an eye on his mail. And the Chicago cops are doing the same for Stefan. And I presume someone got a warrant and went through here, right?"

Max said nothing, but he felt his heart beating faster. Police in his house, searching his things? But wouldn't they have to get his permission to enter? Or would they? Victoria would know, but he couldn't bring himself to ask. She waited for a few minutes, but when he still wouldn't speak, she plunged on. He could see it was becoming an effort for her to talk, but he wouldn't help her.

"But I don't agree with those people. Because I know that Lotty is innocent. And that's why I'm here. Not like a bird of prey, as you think, using your misery for carrion. But to get you to help me. Lotty won't speak to me, and if she's that miserable I won't force her to. But surely, Max, you won't sit idly by and let her be railroaded for something she never did."

Max looked away from her. He was surprised to find himself holding the brandy snifter and set it carefully on a table beside him.

"Max!" Her voice was shot with astonishment. "I don't believe this. You actually think she killed Caudwell."

Max flushed a little, but she'd finally stung him into a re-

sponse. "And you are God who sees all and knows she didn't?"

"I see more than you do," V. I. snapped. "I haven't known Lotty as long as you have, but I know when she's telling the truth."

"So you are God." Max bowed in heavy irony. "You see beyond the facts to the innermost souls of men and women."

He expected another outburst from the young woman, but she gazed at him steadily without speaking. It was a look sympathetic enough that Max felt embarrassed by his sarcasm and burst out with what was on his mind.

"What else am I to think? She hasn't said anything, but there's no doubt that she returned to his apartment Sunday night."

It was V. I.'s turn for sarcasm. "With a little vial of Xanax that she somehow induced him to swallow? And then strangled him for good measure? Come on, Max, you know Lotty: honesty follows her around like a cloud. If she'd killed Caudwell, she'd say something like, 'Yes, I bashed the little vermin's brains in.' Instead she's not speaking at all."

Suddenly the detective's eyes widened with incredulity. "Of course. She thinks you killed Caudwell. You're doing the only thing you can to protect her standing. And she's

doing the same thing. What an admirable pair of archaic knights."

"No!" Max said sharply. "It's not possible. How could she think such a thing? She carried on so wildly that it was embarrassing to be near her. I didn't want to see her or talk to her. That's why I've felt so terrible. If only I hadn't been so obstinate, if only I'd called her Sunday night. How could she think I would kill someone on her behalf when I was so angry with her?"

"Why else isn't she saying anything to anyone?" Warshawski demanded.

"Shame, maybe," Max offered. "You didn't see her on Sunday. I did. That is why I think she killed him, not because some man let her into the building."

His brown eyes screwed shut at the memory. "I have seen Lotty in the grip of anger many times, more than is pleasant to remember, really. But never, never have I seen her in this kind of—uncontrolled rage. You could not talk to her. It was impossible."

The detective didn't respond to that. Instead she said, "Tell me about the statue. I heard a couple of garbled versions from people who were at the party, but I haven't found anyone yet who was in the study when

Caudwell showed it to you. Was it really her grandmother's, do you think? And how did Caudwell come to have it if it was?"

Max nodded mournfully. "Oh, yes. It was really her family's, I'm convinced of that. She could not have known in advance about the details, the flaw in the foot, the imperial seal on the bottom. As to how Caudwell got it, I did a little looking into that myself yesterday. His father was with the Army of Occupation in Germany after the war. A surgeon attached to Patton's staff. Men in such positions had endless opportunities to acquire artworks after the war."

V. I. shook her head questioningly.

"You must know something of this, Victoria. Well, maybe not. You know the Nazis helped themselves liberally to artwork belonging to Jews everywhere they occupied Europe. And not just to Jews—they plundered Eastern Europe on a grand scale. The best guess is that they stole sixteen million pieces—statues, paintings, altarpieces, tapestries, rare books. The list is beyond reckoning, really."

The detective gave a little gasp. "Sixteen million! You're joking."

"Not a joke, Victoria. I wish it were so, but it is not. The U.S. Army of Occupation took charge

of as many works of art as they found in the occupied territories. In theory, they were to find the rightful owners and try to restore them. But in practice few pieces were ever traced, and many of them ended up on the black market.

"You only had to say that such-and-such a piece was worth less than five thousand dollars and you were allowed to buy it. For an officer on Patton's staff, the opportunities for fabulous acquisitions would have been endless. Caudwell said he had the statue authenticated, but of course he never bothered to establish its provenance. Anyway, how could he?" Max finished bitterly. "Lotty's family had a deed of gift from the Emperor, but that would have disappeared long since with the dispersal of their possessions."

"And you really think Lotty would have killed a man just to get this statue back? She couldn't have expected to keep it. Not if she'd killed someone to get it, I mean."

"You are so practical, Victoria. You are too analytical, sometimes, to understand why people do what they do. That was not just a statue. True, it is a priceless artwork, but you know Lotty, you know she places no value on such possessions. No, it meant her family to her, her past, her history, every-

thing that the war destroyed forever for her. You must not imagine that because she never discusses such matters that they do not weigh on her."

V. I. flushed at Max's accusation. "You should be glad I'm analytical. It convinces me that Lotty is innocent. And whether you believe it or not I'm going to prove it."

Max lifted his shoulders slightly in a manner wholly European. "We each support Lotty according to our lights. I saw that she met her bail, and I will see that she gets expert counsel. I am not convinced that she needs you making her innermost secrets public."

V. I.'s grey eyes turned dark with a sudden flash of temper. "You're dead wrong about Lotty. I'm sure the memory of the war is a pain that can never be cured, but Lotty lives in the present, she works in hope for the future. The past does not obsess and consume her as, perhaps, it does you."

Max said nothing. His wide mouth turned in on itself in a narrow line. The detective laid a contrite hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry, Max. That was below the belt."

He forced the ghost of a smile to his mouth.

"Perhaps it's true. Perhaps it's why I love these ancient things so much. I wish

I could believe you about Lotty. Ask me what you want to know. If you promise to leave as soon as I've answered and not to bother me again, I'll answer your questions."

IV

Max put in a dutiful appearance at the Michigan Avenue Presbyterian Church Monday afternoon for Lewis Caudwell's funeral. The surgeon's former wife came, flanked by her children and her husband's brother Griffen. Even after three decades in America Max found himself puzzled sometimes by the natives' behavior: since she and Caudwell were divorced, why had his ex-wife draped herself in black? She was even wearing a veiled hat reminiscent of Queen Victoria.

The children behaved in a moderately subdued fashion, but the girl was wearing a white dress shot with black lightning forks which looked as though it belonged at a disco or a resort. Maybe it was her only dress or her only dress with black in it, Max thought, trying hard to look charitably at the blonde Amazon—after all, she had been suddenly and horribly orphaned.

Even though she was a stranger both in the city and the church, Deborah had hired

one of the church parlors and managed to find someone to cater coffee and light snacks. Max joined the rest of the congregation there after the service.

He felt absurd as he offered condolences to the divorced widow: did she really miss the dead man so much? She accepted his conventional words with graceful melancholy and leaned slightly against her son and daughter. They hovered near her with what struck Max as a stagey solicitude. Seen next to her daughter, Mrs. Caudwell looked so frail and undernourished that she seemed like a ghost. Or maybe it was just that her children had a hearty vitality that even a funeral couldn't quench.

Caudwell's brother Griffen stayed as close to the widow as the children would permit. The man was totally unlike the hearty seadog surgeon. Max thought if he'd met the brothers standing side by side he would never have guessed their relationship. He was tall, like his niece and nephew, but without their robustness. Caudwell had had a thick mop of yellow-white hair; Griffen's domed head was covered by thin wisps of grey. He seemed weak and nervous, and lacked Caudwell's outgoing *bonhomie*; no wonder the surgeon had found it easy to decide the disposition of their father's estate in his favor. Max won-

dered what Griffen had gotten in return.

Mrs. Caudwell's vague, disoriented conversation indicated that she was heavily sedated. That, too, seemed strange. A man she hadn't lived with for four years and she was so upset at his death that she could only manage the funeral on drugs? Or maybe it was the shame of coming as the divorced woman, not a true widow? But then why come at all?

To his annoyance, Max found himself wishing he could ask Victoria about it. She would have some cynical explanation—Caudwell's death meant the end of the widow's alimony and she knew she wasn't remembered in the will. Or she was having an affair with Griffen and was afraid she would betray herself without tranquilizers. Although it was hard to imagine the uncertain Griffen as the object of a strong passion.

Since he had told Victoria he didn't want to see her again when she left on Friday, it was ridiculous of him to wonder what she was doing, whether she was really uncovering evidence that would clear Lotty. Ever since she had gone he had felt a little flicker of hope in the bottom of his stomach. He kept trying to drown it, but it wouldn't quite go away.

Lotty, of course, had not come

to the funeral, but most of the rest of the Beth Israel staff was there, along with the trustees. Arthur Gioia, his giant body filling the small parlor to the bursting point, tried finding a tactful balance between honesty and courtesy with the bereaved family; he made heavy going of it.

A sable-clad Martha Gildersleeve appeared under Gioia's elbow, rather like a furry football he might have tucked away. She made bright, unseemly remarks to the bereaved family about the disposal of Caudwell's artworks.

"Of course, the famous statue is gone now. What a pity. You could have endowed a chair in his honor with the proceeds from that piece alone." She gave a high, meaningless laugh.

Max sneaked a glance at his watch, wondering how long he had to stay before leaving would be rude. His sixth sense, the perfect courtesy that governed his movements, had deserted him, leaving him subject to the gaucheries of ordinary mortals. He never peeked at his watch at functions, and at any prior funeral he would have deftly pried Martha Gildersleeve from her victim. Instead he stood helplessly by while she tortured Mrs. Caudwell and other bystanders alike.

He glanced at his watch again.

Only two minutes had passed

since his last look. No wonder people kept their eyes on their watches at dull meetings: they couldn't believe the clock could move so slowly.

He inched stealthily toward the door, exchanging empty remarks with the staff members and trustees he passed. Nothing negative was said about Lotty to his face, but the comments cut off at his approach added to his misery.

He was almost at the exit when two newcomers appeared. Most of the group looked at them with indifferent curiosity, but Max suddenly felt an absurd stir of elation. Victoria, looking sane and modern in a navy suit, stood in the doorway, eyebrows raised, scanning the room. At her elbow was a police sergeant Max had met with her a few times. The man was in charge of Caudwell's death, too: it was that unpleasant association that kept the name momentarily from his mind.

V. I. finally spotted Max near the door and gave him a discreet sign. He went to her at once.

"I think we may have the goods," she murmured. "Can you get everyone to go? We just want the family, Mrs. Gildersleeve, and Gioia."

"You may have the goods," the police sergeant growled. "I'm here unofficially and reluctantly."

"But you're here." Warshawski grinned, and Max wondered how he ever could have found the look predatory. His own spirits rose enormously at her smile. "You know in your heart of hearts that arresting Lotty was just plain dumb. And now I'm going to make you look real smart. In public, too."

Max felt his suave sophistication return with the rush of elation that an ailing diva must have when she finds her voice again. A touch here, a word there, and the guests disappeared like the hosts of Sen-nacherib. Meanwhile he solicitously escorted first Martha Gildersleeve, then Mrs. Caudwell to adjacent arm-chairs, got the brother to fetch coffee for Mrs. Gildersleeve, the daughter and son to look after the widow.

With Gioia he could be a bit more ruthless, telling him to wait because the police had something important to ask him. When the last guest had melted away, the immunologist stood nervously at the window rattling his change over and over in his pockets. The jingling suddenly was the only sound in the room. Gioia reddened and clasped his hands behind his back.

Victoria came into the room beaming like a governess with a delightful treat in store for

her charges. She introduced herself to the Caudwells.

"You know Sergeant McGonnigal, I'm sure, after this last week. I'm a private investigator. Since I don't have any legal standing, you're not required to answer any questions I have. So I'm not going to ask you any questions. I'm just going to treat you to a travelogue. I wish I had slides, but you'll have to imagine the visuals while the audio track moves along."

"A private investigator!" Steve's mouth formed an exaggerated "O"; his eyes widened in amazement. "Just like Bogie."

He was speaking, as usual, to his sister. She gave her high-pitched laugh and said, "We'll win first prize in the 'How I Spent My Winter Vacation' contests. Our daddy was murdered. Zowie. Then his most valuable possession was snatched. Powie. But he'd already stolen it from the Jewish doctor who killed him. Yowie! And then a P.I. to wrap it all up. Yowie! Zowie! Powie!"

"Deborah, please," Mrs. Caudwell sighed. "I know you're excited, sweetie, but not right now, okay?"

"Your children keep you young, don't they, ma'am?" Victoria said. "How can you ever feel old when your kids stay seven all their lives?"

"Oo, ow, she bites, Debbie, watch out, she bites!" Steve cried.

McGonnigal made an involuntary movement, as though restraining himself from smacking the younger man. "Ms. Warshawski is right: you are under no obligation to answer any of her questions. But you're bright people, all of you: you know I wouldn't be here if the police didn't take her ideas very seriously. So let's have a little quiet and listen to what she's got on her mind."

Victoria seated herself in an armchair near Mrs. Caudwell's. McGonnigal moved to the door and leaned against the jamb. Deborah and Steve whispered and poked each other until one or both of them shrieked. They then made their faces prim and sat with their hands folded on their laps, looking like bright-eyed choirboys.

Griffen hovered near Mrs. Caudwell. "You know you don't have to say anything, Vivian. In fact, I think you should return to your hotel and lie down. The stress of the funeral—then these strangers—"

Mrs. Caudwell's lips curled bravely below the bottom of her veil. "It's all right, Grif; if I managed to survive everything else, one more thing isn't going to do me in."

"Great." Victoria accepted a cup of coffee from Max. "Let me

just sketch events for you as I saw them last week. Like everyone else in Chicago, I read about Dr. Caudwell's murder and saw it on television. Since I know a number of people attached to Beth Israel, I may have paid more attention to it than the average viewer, but I didn't get personally involved until Dr. Herschel's arrest on Tuesday."

She swallowed some coffee and set the cup on the table next to her with a small snap. "I have known Dr. Herschel for close to twenty years. It is inconceivable that she would commit such a murder, as those who know her well should have realized at once. I don't fault the police, but others should have known better: she is hot-tempered. I'm not saying killing is beyond her—I don't think it's beyond any of us. She might have taken the statue and smashed Dr. Caudwell's head in in the heat of rage. But it beggars belief to think she went home, brooded over her injustices, packed a dose of prescription tranquilizer, and headed back to the Gold Coast with murder in mind."

Max felt his cheeks turn hot at her words. He started to interject a protest but bit it back.

"Dr. Herschel refused to make a statement all week, but this afternoon, when I got back from my travels, she finally agreed

to talk to me. Sergeant McGonnigal was with me. She doesn't deny that she returned to Dr. Caudwell's apartment at ten that night—she went back to apologize for her outburst and to try to plead with him to return the statue. He didn't answer when the doorman called up, and on impulse she went around to the back of the building, got in through the service entrance, and waited for some time outside the apartment door. When he neither answered the doorbell nor returned home himself, she finally went away around eleven o'clock. The children, of course, were having a night on the town."

"She says," Gioia interjected.

"Agreed." V. I. smiled. "I make no bones about being a partisan: I accept her version. The more so because the only reason she didn't give it a week ago was that she herself was protecting an old friend. She thought perhaps this friend had bestirred himself on her behalf and killed Caudwell to avenge deadly insults against her. It was only when I persuaded her that these suspicions were as unmerited as—well, as accusations against herself—that she agreed to talk."

Max bit his lip and busied himself with getting more coffee for the three women. Victoria waited for him to finish before continuing.

"When I finally got a detailed account of what took place at Caudwell's party, I heard about three people with an axe to grind. One always has to ask, what axe and how big a grindstone? That's what I've spent the weekend finding out. You might as well know that I've been to Little Rock and to Havelock, North Carolina."

Gioia began jingling the coins in his pockets again. Mrs. Caudwell said softly, "Grif, I am feeling a little faint. Perhaps—"

"Home you go, Mom," Steve cried out with alacrity.

"In a few minutes, Mrs. Caudwell," the sergeant said from the doorway. "Get her feet up, Warshawski."

For a moment Max was afraid that Steve or Deborah was going to attack Victoria, but McGonnigal moved over to the widow's chair and the children sat down again. Little drops of sweat dotted Griffen's balding head; Gioia's face had a greenish sheen, foliage on top of his redwood neck.

"The thing that leapt out at me," Victoria continued calmly, as though there had been no interruption, "was Caudwell's remark to Dr. Gioia. The doctor was clearly upset, but people were so focused on Lotty and the statue that they didn't pay any attention to that.

"So I went to Little Rock, Ar-

kansas, on Saturday and found the Paul Nierman whose name Caudwell had mentioned to Gioia. Nierman lived in the same fraternity with Gioia when they were undergraduates together twenty-five years ago. And he took Dr. Gioia's anatomy and physiology exams his junior year when Gioia was in danger of academic probation, so he could stay on the football team.

"Well, that seemed unpleasant, perhaps disgraceful. But there's no question that Gioia did all his own work in medical school, passed his boards, and so on. So I didn't think the board would demand a resignation for this youthful indiscretion. The question was whether Gioia thought they would, and if he would have killed to prevent Caudwell making it public."

She paused, and the immunologist blurted out, "No. No. But Caudwell—Caudwell knew I'd opposed his appointment. He and I—our approaches to medicine were very opposite. And as soon as he said Nierman's name to me, I knew he'd found out and that he'd torment me with it forever. I—I went back to his place Sunday night to have it out with him. I was more determined than Dr. Herschel and got into his unit through the kitchen entrance; he hadn't locked that.

"I went to his study, but he was already dead. I couldn't believe it. It absolutely terrified me. I could see he'd been strangled and—well, it's no secret that I'm strong enough to have done it. I wasn't thinking straight. I just got clean away from there—I think I've been running ever since."

"You!" McGonnigal shouted. "How come we haven't heard about this before?"

"Because you insisted on focusing on Dr. Herschel," V. I. said nastily. "I knew he'd been there because the doorman told me. He would have told you if you'd asked."

"This is terrible," Mrs. Gildersleeve interjected. "I am going to talk to the board tomorrow and demand the resignations of Dr. Gioia and Dr. Herschel."

"Do," Victoria agreed cordially. "Tell them the reason you got to stay for this was because Murray Ryerson at the *Herald-Star* was doing a little checking for me here in Chicago. He found out that part of the reason you were so jealous of Caudwell's collection is that you're living terribly in debt. I won't humiliate you in public by telling people what your money has gone to, but you've had to sell your husband's art collection and you have a third mortgage on your house. A valuable statue with no docu-

mented history would have taken care of everything."

Martha Gildersleeve shrank inside her sable. "You don't know anything about this."

"Well, Murray talked to Pablo and Eduardo. . . . Yes, I won't say anything else. So anyway, Murray checked whether either Gioia or Mrs. Gildersleeve had the statue. They didn't, so—"

"You've been in my house?" Mrs. Gildersleeve shrieked.

V. I. shook her head. "Not me. Murray Ryerson." She looked apologetically at the sergeant. "I knew you'd never get a warrant for me, since you'd made an arrest. And you'd never have got it in time, anyway."

She looked at her coffee cup, saw it was empty and put it down again. Max took it from the table and filled it for her a third time. His fingertips were itching with nervous irritation; some of the coffee landed on his trouser leg.

"I talked to Murray Saturday night from Little Rock. When he came up empty here, I headed for North Carolina. To Havelock, where Griffen and Lewis Caudwell grew up and where Mrs. Caudwell still lives. And I saw the house where Griffen lives, and talked to the doctor who treats Mrs. Caudwell, and—"

"You really are a pooper snooper, aren't you," Steve said.

"Pooper snooper, pooper snooper," Deborah chanted. "Don't get enough thrills of your own so you have to live on other people's shit."

"Yeah, the neighbors talked to me about you two." Victoria looked at them with contemptuous indulgence. "You've been a two-person wolfpack terrifying most of the people around you since you were three. But the folks in Havelock admired how you always stuck up for your mother. You thought your father got her addicted to tranquilizers and then left her high and dry. So you brought her newest version with you and were all set—you just needed to decide when to give it to him. Dr. Herschel's outburst over the statue played right into your hands. You figured your father had stolen it from your uncle to begin with—why not send it back to him and let Dr. Herschel take the rap?"

"It wasn't like that," Steve said, red spots burning in his cheeks.

"What was it like, son?" McGonnigal had moved next to him.

"Don't talk to them—they're tricking you," Deborah shrieked. "The pooper snooper and her gopher gooper."

"She—Mommy used to love us before Daddy made her take all this shit. Then she went away. We just wanted him to

see what it was like. We started putting Xanax in his coffee and stuff; we wanted to see if he'd fuck up during surgery, let his life get ruined. But then he was sleeping there in the study after his stupid-ass party, and we thought we'd just let him sleep through his morning surgery. Sleep forever, you know, it was so easy, we used his own Harvard necktie. I was so fucking sick of hearing 'Early to bed, early to rise' from him. And we sent the statue to Uncle Grif. I suppose the pooper snooper found it there. He can sell it and Mother can be all right again."

"Grandpa stole it from Jews and Daddy stole it from Grif, so we thought it worked out perfectly if we stole it from Daddy," Deborah cried. She leaned her blonde head next to her brother's and shrieked with laughter.

V

Max watched the line of Lotty's legs change as she stood on tiptoe to reach a brandy snifter. Short, muscular from years of racing at top speed from one point to the next, maybe they weren't as svelte as the long legs of modern American girls, but he preferred them. He waited until her feet were securely planted before making his announcement.

"The board is bringing in

Justin Hardwick for a final interview for chief of staff."

"Max!" She whirled, the Bengal fire sparkling in her eyes. "I know this Hardwick and he is another like Caudwell, looking for cost-cutting and no poverty patients. I won't have it."

"We've got you and Gioia and a dozen others bringing in so many non-paying patients that we're not going to survive another five years at the present rate. I figure it's a balancing act. We need someone who can see that the hospital survives so that you and Art can practice medicine the way you want to. And when he knows what happened to his predecessor, he'll be very careful not to stir up our resident tigress."

"Max!" She was hurt and astonished at the same time. "Oh. You're joking, I see. It's not very funny to me, you know."

"My dear, we've got to learn to laugh about it: it's the only way we'll ever be able to forgive ourselves for our terrible misjudgments." He stepped over to put an arm around her. "Now where is this remarkable surprise you promised to show me."

She shot him a look of pure mischief, Lotty on a dare as he first remembered meeting her at eighteen. His hold on her tightened and he followed her

to her bedroom. In a glass case in the corner, complete with a humidity-control system, stood the Pietro Andromache.

Max looked at the beautiful, anguished face. I understand your sorrows, she seemed to say to him. I understand your grief for your mother, your family, your history, but it's all right to let go of them; to live in the present and hope for the future. It's not a betrayal.

Tears pricked his eyelids, but he demanded, "How did you get this? I was told the police had it under lock and key until lawyers decided on the disposition of Caudwell's estate."

"Victoria," Lotty said shortly. "I told her the problem and she got it for me. On the condition that I not ask how she did it. And Max, you know—*damned* well that it was not Caudwell's to dispose of."

It was Lotty's. Of course it was. Max wondered briefly how Joseph the Second had come by it to begin with. For that matter, what had Lotty's great-great-grandfather done to earn it from the emperor? Max looked into Lotty's tiger eyes and kept such reflections to himself. Instead he inspected Hector's foot where the filler had been carefully scraped away to reveal the old chip.

UNSOLVED

by Guy Savant

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

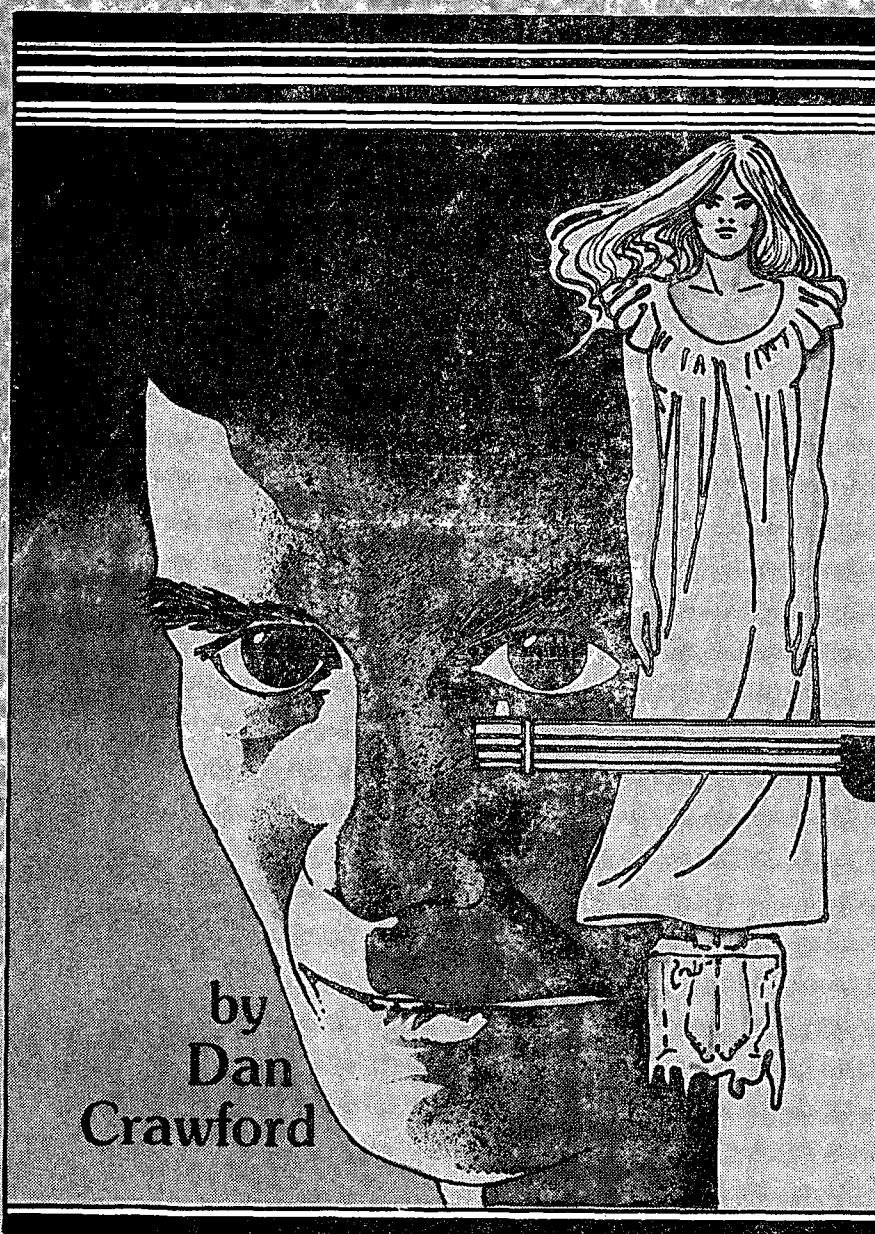
The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.

Just yesterday five accomplices were apprehended: Gerald, Harold, Ivan, Jack, and Karl. The masterminds escaped. Beside a counterfeit money operation that began at noon, a host of other crimes were being perpetrated as well, each bringing in its own tidy illegal profit, up to \$1,000.

From the clues below can you figure out which accomplice helped which mastermind on which crime and how much each team made off the job?

1. The \$600 job was committed an hour before the \$800 job; of all the accomplices, Karl pulled in the most money.
2. Bob committed the first crime of the day; his job brought in more money than the auto theft, but less than the bank robbery.
3. The five crimes occurred at 10 A.M., 11 A.M., noon, 10 P.M., and 11 P.M.
4. Smuggling profited Jack more than \$700 but was a late-night operation, something Curt, an early riser, would never be part of.
5. Harold made only a hundred dollars less than Frank, who made a hundred less than Denny.
6. Gerald helped Edgar with his job more than two hours after the kidnapping and did not make as much as the kidnappers; Ivan pulled his \$900 job one hour after the bank robbery.

See page 132 for the solution to the November puzzle.



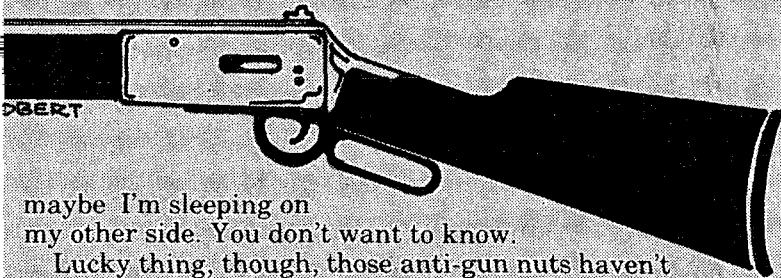
by
Dan
Crawford

Illustration by Jim Odhart

On a Clear Day, You Can See Night

I used to have trouble with mine, too. Oh, you know. All the usual things. The bills for clothes, the stuff all over the bathroom, feet cold as ice. And nagging! "You never learned to pick up your clothes, I guess." "You know I hate cigar smoke in the dining room." "For heaven's sake, don't put your can on that table without a coaster!" I'm watching the game; I've got time to go look where she's hid the damn coasters?

And what I married her for: there wasn't any of that, let me tell you. It's too humid all the time, or she's got a stomach ache, or we both need our sleep, you've got to go to work in the morning. Got more before I married her. And then there's those feet all the time, like ice cubes, right in the small of the back, except when



maybe I'm sleeping on my other side. You don't want to know.

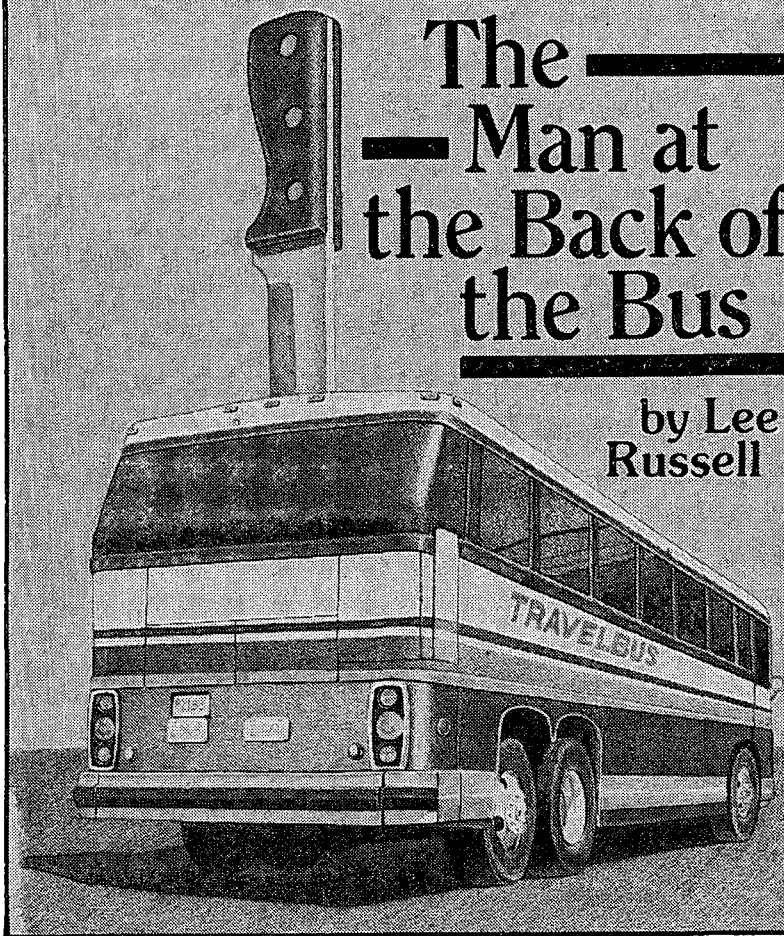
Lucky thing, though, those anti-gun nuts haven't infiltrated the county yet. I don't have problems any more.

No bills for clothes: she wears that one nightgown all the time now. She doesn't go into the bathroom. She stays put and keeps her mouth shut. And I can do what I like, go to bed when I want to, and do what I want to once I get there, too.

Of course, nothing's perfect. Those feet would freeze a polar bear's belly.

The — — Man at the Back of the Bus

by Lee
Russell



Night was best—his hands firm on the wheel, the solid motor hum and the only light the dashboard glow, the rear restroom doorlight mirrored above, and his headlight beams pushing into the fog. Night was dan-

gerous, of course. The interstate curved, climbed, and descended, skirting deep fog-shrouded drops; but the bus seemed tracked to the road and Corvin liked the feeling of responsibility. He glanced up at his inside mirror. All seven remaining

Illustration by Brian Battles

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passengers seemed asleep—an almost typical load: front right window seat, vacationing schoolteacher type; a few rows back, grandparent types; and still farther back, the kid, tonight's a girl although you could hardly tell—jeans, shoulder bag, faded jersey, and cropped brown hair.

Then on his side, a sharp young cool-cat black in opaque sunglasses and glued-on ear-phones; and farther behind him, a young guy like himself—army on leave or in construction.

Only the fat guy, who'd grabbed the long rear seat by the restroom that you could stretch out on, didn't seem to belong on a bus. With his briefcase and dark jacket and pants, he looked like someone they'd send out if you complained about your gas bill and couldn't settle with the first guy they sent. Corvin had had to tell him no cigars even in the smoking section and that didn't happen often. Cigar types seldom rode the bus.

Fog-haloed lights glowed suddenly up and off to his right. MountAire; not a scheduled stop but okayed for minor emergencies. Coffee, Corvin thought, and swung off the interstate and flipped on the luggage rack lights. Also, he had another crazy-passenger story for Janice, MountAire's cashier. Being older or looking older with her

madeup eyes and stiff pale hair, she was not his type but was a fellow pro versus the general public.

He parked in the truck area well away from the lighted restaurant. "Rest stop," he called and watched his passengers stir, sit up, and peer out into the dark. The only other vehicles, two cars, would be Janice's and the night manager's. He opened the bus and jumped down to the outraged yapping of the penned watchdogs and swung his arms in the cold mountain night air while his passengers collected their stuff. He reached up to help the schoolteacher type down but she brushed him away, misstepped, made a strangled angry sound, and stalked off. Grandma let him help. Grandpa waved him off. The rest made it on their own. Corvin closed the bus and followed across the dark lot.

He pulled open the heavy door to food smells, low country-western music, and overhead lights glaring down onto the food counter, the red vinyl-upholstered side booths, and the orange Formica-topped center tables. The manager glanced in from the back. Janice, at her register, had left coffee, a newspaper, and a ledger in the first booth. Corvin drew coffee and asked: "And how's every little thing tonight?"

"How I like it. Slow and quiet."

No cashier-waitress smile, but Corvin slid into her booth and picked up her morning paper. The route man must have come.

His people passed carrying trays, all having bought about what he'd have predicted: the Cool Cat, chocolate cake and large cola; the construction type guy, pie and coffee; the school-teacher type, a wrapped sandwich, probably egg salad, the cheapest. In a far corner, the kid, knees bent, feet up on the booth seat, unwrapped her own large candy bar. The grandparent types sat at a table with only light coffees. That was one thing that got him on meal stops: old people and kids never seemed to have eating money. Once he'd tried to buy something for a really old couple sitting over just glasses of water but hadn't handled it right.

Count your passengers, he'd learned, before, during, and after every stop; so he counted: one - two - three - four - five - six. Somebody was missing. The fat guy at the rear of the bus. Now, go wake him or let him sleep? Janice, bringing hot coffees, slid into the booth. Corvin compromised. He'd wake him at re-loading in case he wanted to grab a takeout.

Janice held her coffee mug in both hands. "So, how's the road tonight?"

"Still there. Nobody's moved it yet."

Backed by pings, clangs, and sirens—Cool Cat was now at the video games—Corvin told about the smuggled-aboard pet chicken that had got loose at a major interchange, then checked his watch. "Well, better get going."

"Time, people," he called, borrowing from an English movie he'd once seen on motel TV, and counted again: one-two three-four-five—damn! Somebody else was missing. The kid. "Where's the kid?" he asked the room in general.

The grandma type nodded toward the restrooms.

"I'll go get her," Janice said and slid from the booth.

When she returned and the girl-kid joined the other passengers leaving the restaurant, Janice explained: "She was being sick. But very neatly. No mess. Shows training somewhere. And no wonder. I went into her shoulder bag for tissues and it was crammed with candy bars she's probably been stuffing on the whole trip. And she acted scared of me. Well, I do scare kids. I'm the one has to quiet them down or move them out of here."

Outside, Corvin crossed the dark parking lot, overtaking his straggling passengers who'd already re-enraged the penned watchdogs, and opened the bus but said, "Wait here." Best to get the fat man out for his take-

out, if wanted, before they crowded the aisle.

Clasping alternate seat backs, he went back to where the fat man lay, legs slewed to the floor and newspaper tented over his chest. On his hanging wrist and hand were a large gold watch and a black-stoned ring. His feet had overturned a not-quite-empty coffee container. Corvin moved the briefcase farther from the spill and put a hand onto the man's shoulder.

"Rest stop's almost over. If you want anything you'll have to get it now."

But the man did not wake. Corvin shook his shoulder, shifting the newspaper which, instead of sliding off, seemed to fold, on the far side, against some protuberance. Corvin lifted the newspaper. Sticking into the man's chest was a knife. After what seemed minutes, Corvin made himself lay a hand along the man's neck as he'd seen people do on TV. The neck was not cold. Cold, he knew, meant dead. First Aid had not covered this. This meant an ambulance fast—out here in the middle of nowhere. He put the newspaper back, hurried out, closed the bus, and said, "There'll be a delay; come back inside," and ran for the restaurant.

Inside, he told Janice, who called the manager who phoned for the ambulance and police.

Corvin then phoned his dispatcher, who asked:

"Are they going to release the bus or do we have to send another one?"

"I don't know," Corvin said. "This just happened. Nobody's here yet."

"Well, call back when you know. How many've you got?"

"Seven—six, now."

"Well, let me know. And give me your number there."

Corvin did and hung up.

The passengers, all back inside, stood in a loose group waiting to be told what was going on. Cool Cat had even taken off his earphones.

"I'm sorry," Corvin said, "but there's going to be a serious delay. Something's happened to one of the passengers."

"Who?" the construction type asked.

"Has to be that fat dude in the back," Cool Cat said. "Everybody else is here."

All looked to Corvin for confirmation, so he said, "Yes."

"A heart attack?" the grandmother type asked.

"No."

"A stroke?"

"No."

"Well, what then?" the construction type wanted to know.

Corvin didn't want to lie or be rude. After all, these people were going to be seriously inconvenienced and over something not their fault. Then it

occurred to him that, *hara-kiri* being unlikely, someone had to have stuck in that knife and here stood the only, however unlikely, candidates.

"I'm sorry," he said again, "but you'll all just have to wait for the medics and police to explain."

"Cops!" Cool Cat said. "Man, what's happened out there?"

"I'm really sorry." Corvin glanced toward Janice, who signaled by lifting the two cups of coffee she was carrying. "But it'll be for the police or medics to explain."

The passengers dispersed, each to where he'd sat before. Making a home away from home. Corvin had noticed before that passengers almost always carried desserts to their original tables past all nearer, now empty ones.

In their booth, he started to tell Janice quietly what he had found. Print dress and folded plump hands appeared at his elbow.

"I don't mean to interfere," the grandmother type said, "but oughtn't somebody be sitting with the—deceased?"

Corvin's hand bumped his coffee cup. "Nobody's deceased!"

"Then, all the more reason, surely?"

Corvin, shamed, slid from the booth. Out there was not an inconvenient object to shut a door

on until professionals arrived, but a fellow human being. But nobody was supposed to disturb the scene of a crime. The grandfather type came over, adding:

"We meant us, not you. We're more used to—"

Corvin would have trusted these two decent-looking people with anyone, anywhere, any time; but he looked around as if for help; then said, "Well—but don't touch anything. *Anything*."

He took the couple out, let them into the bus, and watched them file back, glance at the tented newspaper, and sit down nearby.

"It'll be all right," the woman assured him. "You've got your other passengers to see to."

Released, Corvin returned to Janice and quietly described what he found.

She set down her coffee. "Fat dark-haired guy in dark suit with briefcase and flashy watch and ring? I know the guy!"

"You mean he's local?"

"Well, not exactly. He owns several fast food franchises around here—back off the interstate, in the towns—and comes through here regularly going from one to the other."

"I'd think a guy like that would be driving."

"He was. Big black Caddy. But his license was suspended after a bad, late-night accident. His fault. He'd been drinking.

And not his first such, it came out."

Janice had brought doughnuts earlier. Corvin ate one.

"It was a real freak thing," she continued. "Pictures made the newspapers all over and even network TV. A woman, with her kid, was driving to the airport to pick up her husband. This guy hit them on Memorial Bridge and somehow her car ended up hanging by its rear wheels or something from the parapet."

"My God!"

"You can imagine—woman and kid screaming, scared to move. Nobody could figure out how the car could have got there or why it didn't plunge into the river before men got the woman and kid out."

"And this guy got off with just a suspended license!"

"And a fine."

"If it'd been my wife and kid I'd have wanted to kill him."

An appliance hummed on behind the food counter.

"Who else has been around here tonight?" Corvin asked.

"Nobody—except the paper route man and a tourist family hours ago, both long come and gone."

"And the route man—"

"Isn't the accident victim's husband. He's somebody I've known since high school. I see where you're going, but no. With the radio off—and I had

it off doing accounts till you people came—you can hear right through these thin windows anything that turns off the interstate and even anybody on foot on the gravel. And Brutus and Cassius—their names came with them—bark at every passing moth. Anyway, isn't your bus kept locked when you're not in it?"

"Yes."

"Besides," Janice added, "from what I remember, that woman's husband just isn't the type. According to the papers he did yell, 'Let me at that guy!' when the police met him at the airport and told him what had happened; but later on local TV he was just a nice quiet guy glad his family was okay and his car insured."

"Just the same, would you know him if you saw him?"

"I don't know. He was pretty ordinary looking and all this was weeks ago."

Corvin glanced out at his scattered passengers.

"No way," Janice said. "You've got just three males. One too old, one too young, and the other black."

At the sound of approaching sirens, Corvin stood up.

"Stay here," he ordered his passengers and went out to meet the ambulance and the light-flashing patrol car from which emerged two uniformed men even younger than him-

self. They beat the ambulance men to the bus, cleared out the elderly couple and quickly flash-photoed all down the aisle.

"Since the county types aren't here yet," the shorter officer explained, "and this guy has to be moved—"

The taller cop lifted the newspaper, swore under his breath and put the paper back. The ambulance men tossed it to the seat in front and felt for a pulse.

"A live one," one said. "Let's get him out of here."

"You'd think," the taller cop said, "getting stabbed would wake anybody up."

An ambulance man picked up the toppled coffee container and put it into a plastic bag. The shorter cop lifted the briefcase by a pen through its handle and set it onto a forward seat. Then began the struggle to get the fat man onto the stretcher and out. There was no room to maneuver and the man probably weighed three hundred fifty pounds.

Each taking an arm or leg, the two ambulance and two highway men managed to hoist the fat man onto the stretcher laid on seat backs; then, taking a stretcher corner each, to carry it above the seats up the aisle. But they couldn't make the turn to go down the steps. One took the man under his arms and two others backed down holding a leg each. They set

him onto the ground, then lifted him back to the stretcher.

"We need a drill for this," an ambulance man said, rolling the stretcher to the ambulance. He loaded it and closed the double doors and the ambulance took off.

The taller highway man got out pen and notebook. "The victim's name and address?"

"Passengers don't give names and addresses," Corvin said. "Just tickets."

"We should have looked into his wallet," the other officer said.

"Well, we didn't. They'll get that at the hospital." The taller cop looked from the elderly couple to Corvin. "Witnesses?"

"No. They just sat with the man."

"Go on up to the restaurant then," he ordered the couple, who went. "Now, what happened? A fight?"

"No," Corvin said.

"What then?"

"I don't know. I supposed he was asleep on that rear seat and didn't go to wake him until reloading—and that's how I found him."

"Your other passengers are up at the restaurant?"

"Yes. It's okay. You can see the door from here and there's no place out here to go."

"Just the same," the shorter officer said, "I'd better get up there and keep an

eye on things." He went.

"Now," the taller cop asked Corvin, "when did you last see the victim up and about and okay?"

Corvin tucked his hands under his folded arms against the night chill. "Not since the previous stop, I think. I glance up at my mirror to check if anything's going on but can't watch it all the time. My eyes are supposed to be on the road."

"But you did see him up and okay at your last stop?"

"There, for sure. It was a cleaning stop. Everybody had to get off. And I went through to make sure nobody left a purse or anything valuable. At cleaning stops, I always say, 'Everything off the seats and floor you want to keep. Take it with you or stow it on the luggage rack,' but almost always somebody leaves something. Just a newspaper, maybe, or a bus schedule to hold their seats, but they're always mad when they come back and find it gone in the trash."

"Between that stop and here, then? You didn't see him up doing anything?"

"No."

"See anybody else going back there or fooling around that rear seat?"

Corvin looked at him. "Everybody goes back there. That seat's right by the restroom."

"You mean that between your previous stop and this *everybody* was going back and forth to the rear of the bus?"

"Probably." Corvin tried to call back the dark, mirrored images. "Passengers standing up catch my attention. I usually look up just in time to see them sidling to the aisle."

"And *everybody* made these trips?"

"Except," Corvin said, "possibly a schoolteacher type in the front seat to my right; and the grandma type you saw here. The first I'm sure of, now that I think. Sure she never left her seat but just sort of slept sitting up, the seat not reclined. Grandpa went back twice, but his wife, I think, not at all. As to the kid and the two guys on my side, I got the picture of a lot of coming and going."

"How many passengers were there?"

"Six, not counting the fat man."

"Well, we'll see what they might have seen."

"They were mostly asleep," Corvin reminded him. "But that newspaper would pick up the light. It'd have to have been put there after the stabbing to cover it up. Some passengers might remember whether it was there on their own trip and who went back before or after them."

"What about funny movements near the rear seat, any-

thing extra instead of going straight inside?"

Corvin wanted to laugh. "On a straight, level road passengers can hardly get down the aisle and through that door. Here, with hills and curves, they lurch every which way, grab at everything, land on each other, and never seem to make it through the door first try. Their fingerprints, if it matters, will be all over seat backs, grab handles, and that door and wall."

"I thought you said your last stop was a cleaning stop."

"Not that kind. Just for sweeping out and tidying the restroom."

Two cars, one flashing red, came over the hill, sirens going, and swung up into the parking lot. One plain car bore the word CORONER, and from the other emerged the photo and fingerprint man. He and the uniformed county policemen took over the bus. The coroner, finding the victim gone and presumably alive, swung his car around and left.

Flash photos were taken; then, carrying the briefcase wrapped in plastic, the fingerprint-photo man also drove off. The four police, trailed by Corvin, went back to the restaurant where the passengers sat scattered as before. The men got coffees and took the second booth, pulling up a chair for the

interviewees. Janice, bringing more coffee, joined Corvin in the first booth.

Corvin heard tearing paper, and a notepad sheet and pen were handed around the booth back to him.

"Sketch where everybody was sitting."

Corvin drew a rectangle, put in circles for seats, then asked, "How? I don't know any names."

"Just—" the officer lowered his voice—"put in 'kid,' 'black,' 'old couple,' and so on. We'll know."

Corvin did and handed back the sheet. The interviews began with the schoolteacher type and continued in seating order. Corvin and Janice could hear and other passengers looked across as even they heard a word now and then. It was brief: names, home addresses, where got on, destinations, addresses there, phone numbers, if and when they'd visited the restroom after the previous stop and if so whether the fat man had been asleep and whether or not the newspaper had been on his chest. I.D.'s were asked for.

The schoolteacher type turned out to be a supermarket assistant manager, a Mrs. Leffert, who'd gotten on in Indianapolis and was on vacation to New York. The older couple, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Thompson, en route to see a new grandchild, had gotten on in Columbus and lived

in a small nearby town where, the man complained, buses no longer stopped.

"Or trains or anything," he added bitterly.

The kid, also, had gotten on in Indianapolis and was headed for a summer job on her grandparents' farm. The black, who had boarded in Columbus, had no current address.

"Man, I just had a crummy room. I gave it up. I'm on my way to the Big Apple to sta-ay."

Corvin knew from the silence that all four cops had picked their stabber.

"So, let's have your former address and some I.D."

"Man, this is a who-ole new start! I threw all that high school garbage away."

"You can *remember* your former address?"

"Sure, man. No sweat," the black said and gave it.

"Okay, you can go." Another silence and Corvin knew all four were watching the black kid swagger back to his booth.

The young white male *was* ex-army and on his way to Trenton to stay with a former buddy who'd written about a job opening where he worked. He gave his and the buddy's addresses.

As to the newspaper, all had either seen it on the man's chest or not noticed or couldn't remember.

"And," one officer said, "not

a damned thing on the fat guy himself."

Janice leaned from the booth. "I can help you there." She then quietly repeated what she'd told Corvin and added, "And he wasn't a nice type."

"How not nice?"

"The kind to make a pass at every female but only with his hands or mouth while his eyes looked somewhere else. Like he was saying, 'I'll take it if it's easy, Pig, but if not, skip off.'"

Corvin felt shocked. Janice might not be Miss America, but she was no pig.

"And," Janice went on, "flashy watch and ring and a roll instead of money in a wallet like other people and twice I caught him trying to eat without paying."

Corvin could hear pen on paper.

"Once," Janice continued, "when I bent down to get some dropped change, he set two pastries on a table and then came through with just coffee. I waited till he bit into one, then marched right over, but he saw me coming and had his roll out. 'Guess I forgot to pay for these,' he said, peeling off two singles. 'Keep the change.' The other time I came back from the storeroom to find him stuffing the last of something into his mouth. Again, the big spender. Overpaid with 'Keep the change,' which I did."

"Sounds like a real creep," one officer said.

"He was—or is." Janice settled back into her booth.

Corvin leaned out to ask, "Are any of you guys the sheriff?"

The county men seemed to blush. "Deputies," one said. "Sheriff's on vacation. Off in his camper. They're trying to locate him."

"So what now?" the other said. "We can't just keep these people here. One may be the stabber, but the others aren't. Nobody saw anything. They aren't even witnesses and don't even know each other. I mean, we're not going to *solve* this now like on TV. Other cops are going to have to check these people out in their home areas and look for connections to this guy."

"And," another said, "there's this business of the husband of that woman in that bridge accident he caused."

"Maybe," Corvin suggested, "by now the hospital knows how serious it all is. I mean, if the guy dies that's one thing but if maybe he's not even seriously hurt—"

"It sure looked serious to me," the first deputy said but slid from the booth and went to the phone. When he hung up he turned and said loudly to all, including the watching passen-

gers, "Still in surgery, so they don't know yet."

"How long you going to keep us here," Cool Cat asked. "Man, I got to get me to New York."

All the passengers looked the same question.

"Don't know yet." The deputy averted his glance and returned to his booth.

"And my bus?" Corvin asked. "Released, impounded, or what? Can I drive these people on whenever? Or do I need to phone for another one?"

The four officers found places to look other than at Corvin or each other. Authority obviously resided somewhere out on a fishing stream but had to be exercised here.

"I'd say," the taller highway man said, "phone your dispatcher and put it up to him. Or have them send a bus, then with two drivers you can take both or leave this one here according to how it all comes out."

Corvin went to the phone and returned, saying, "They're sending a bus. But how does it all come out?"

"Once scattered," the shorter deputy pointed out, "we're never going to have these passengers all together again. It'll be man-hunt time all over."

All the passengers were watching the police.

"Let's go back out and look around the bus again," a

highway officer suggested.

"Why?" a deputy asked. "There's nothing left but the other passengers' stuff, and we can't search that without a warrant or probable cause. The hospital guys took the coffee container, the fingerprint guy the briefcase—"

"Did anybody see what was in that briefcase?" Corvin asked.

"Just papers," the deputy said, "bills, invoices, letters, tax forms, like the guy was carrying around his desk."

"Maybe," Corvin suggested, "this has nothing to do with my passengers. Maybe it's business, his franchises. He cheated somebody or got a franchise somebody else wanted."

"Could your bus door be forced open?"

"Not without leaving marks and we didn't see any."

MountAire's night manager started carrying in breakfast steam trays of scrambled eggs, sausages, and pancakes. Spicy and doughy aromas filled the room.

"Lester," a highway man said. "We forgot about Lester. Where's he been all this time? Franchises might just be—"

Janice, getting up to go help, said, "No way. Lester's been here forever and, like me, likes a salary just fine and not the risk or responsibility of franchising. We talk sometimes

about setting up on our own but always decide to let a good thing be."

"Never seen him conferring with that fat guy?"

"Never. And since I do the books, I *know* there's been no business dealings. Lester's a good, quiet family man. Lives with his wife and mother. Grown kids gone. Besides, he was right here, back in the storeroom or kitchen or carrying in stuff all the time since the bus pulled in."

"You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. There are things he does and things I do. If I'd had it all to do when a crowd came in, even a little crowd like this, believe me I'd have noticed and gone looking for him."

"There's no back door?"

"There's a back door but it's right at the end of the dog run and nobody but nobody, including me and Lester, gets by Brutus and Cassius without an uproar to wake the dead. There's been *no* barking tonight except when these passengers came in and went out and when Corvin went out and you all came in."

A truck pulled up outside and the dogs barked.

"Bakery," Janice said. "He hates the dogs and won't go around back." She went to prop open the front door.

"Let's go back out," the high-

way man urged again. "There's always supposed to be something you overlook."

"TV again," the other said but slid from the booth, releasing his partner.

More, Corvin felt, because they couldn't think what to do and the passengers might start demanding to leave than because they hoped to find anything, all four went back out to the bus, Corvin along to open it.

They filed down the bus aisle and, except for the fat man's missing belongings, all was just as before: luggage above the taken seats and here and there a bus schedule to hold a seat although the bus had been mostly empty.

"What are we looking for?" a deputy asked.

"Let's just look," the highway man said, "systematically."

So they looked under seats, between seats and windows and into ashtrays. Corvin glanced into the restroom. The shorter deputy sat down on the seat forward of the rear one and Corvin, hearing the crackle of paper, said, "They forgot this," and reached to tug out the newspaper as the deputy half rose.

"So the fat guy reads."

"He might have marked something."

The taller deputy took the paper and leafed rapidly through.

"Nothing," he said. "No marks. No dogears. In fact, except for dumb bum sitting on it, it doesn't even look read." He handed it back to Corvin, who shoved the pages neatly together and refolded it, then stared at the top front page.

"The Indianapolis *Star*. What's this local guy doing with an Indiana newspaper?"

"Let's see." The taller highway officer took the paper. "No subscription sticker. Well, some earlier passenger must have left it and the fat guy picked it up. Passengers do that, don't they?"

"All the time," Corvin said, "except that the bus was cleaned at the stop before this, remember? Left-behind newspapers would have been thrown or swept out."

"He could have picked it up earlier, before the cleaning stop, stashed it on the luggage rack, then got it down later," a deputy suggested.

"Let's pretend we didn't think of that," the highway officer said and opened his notebook. "Let's see. Bus is headed east. The young white guy got on at Pittsburgh; the black kid and the older couple at Columbus, and from Indiana only your schoolteacher type and the kid. But don't all big bus stations sell papers from all over?"

"Nobody," the deputy said, "buys out-of-state papers ex-

cept from where they're from or where they're going."

"Besides," Corvin added, "while I'm busy in the lot or office and don't get into waiting rooms much, I think most of those big old newsstands with newspapers from all over, hundreds of magazines, and little colored candies in glass pistols or airplanes are gone. It's coin bins now and just local or nearby city papers. I'll bet every newspaper on this bus is from its owner's boarding city. So, if this isn't the fat guy's paper—"

"It's likely the stabber's."

On the luggage rack they found above the seat of the older couple who'd gotten on in Columbus a Columbus *Dispatch*; and above that of the construction type who'd boarded in Pittsburgh, a Pittsburgh *Press*. Any other newspapers had been discarded already or cleaned out at the preceding stop. They looked especially thoroughly through and around Cool Cat's meager effects, although he, too, had gotten on in Columbus.

"And that," the shorter deputy said, "leaves only Mrs. Leffert, your schoolteacher type, and the girl-kid who could have bought an Indianapolis paper and I doubt if the kid can read."

"But Mrs. Leffert," Corvin reminded them, "is the one I know for sure never left her seat between the last two stops."

"So—" two men said.

"Oh, come on," the shorter deputy said. "The kid's a mess and trying to make herself as unattractive as possible and swinging between sassy brass and please-don't-hurt-poor-little-me, but still—let's think this through again."

"What's to think? Only two passengers could have bought this paper and one this bus guy says never left her seat."

Corvin felt his mind blanking out. "But that girl can't be more than thirteen or fourteen! And why—"

"Fourteen," the highway man with the notebook said, "according to her I.D. Cheryl Peterson, fourteen. Where do plain kids like that get these fancy names?"

"That I.D.," the shorter deputy said, "was just one of those cards that comes with your wallet. She could have put down any name or age. 'Cheryl' could turn out to be 'Edith.'"

They filed out and back toward the restaurant.

"A newspaper," Corvin said, "isn't much to go on."

"But it's all we've got." The taller highway man began walking faster, causing the others to do the same. "If it wasn't the fat guy's newspaper, chances are it was the stabber's. Who else would lay his newspaper over a knife sticking into a chest and say nothing? Any-

way, it's worth trying on."

"Well, remember," the other highway man said, "we can't let her say anything without the warning and can't scare or intimidate her. And, in any case, she's a juvenile."

They entered and headed toward the kid, again sitting, huddled it almost seemed, in her corner booth, feet up, knees bent, and eating another candy bar. One deputy pulled out his Miranda card and Corvin fell behind as he realized that, from the girl's viewpoint, they must look like advancing storm troopers.

But before they got to her, the girl shrank back farther into her corner and called, "Momma!"

All five men turned to look for some woman who'd suddenly appeared. None had.

"Momma!" It was a cry to wrench the heart. The grandmother type started to get up, but this time it was clear to whom the cry was directed. Mrs. Leffert, sitting very straight and still, for several seconds still did not look at the girl or anyone, as if all this did not concern her in any way.

The girl buried her head into her arms folded on her bent knees and began to cry. "I didn't want to! I didn't! Even after everything, I didn't want to do it!"

Hastily the deputy rattled off the Miranda warning, then kept

repeating, "Do you understand? Do you understand? You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to a lawyer—"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Corvin said. "The girl's past all that."

Mrs. Leffert stood up, smoothed her skirt, and came to stand in front of her daughter. "It's me you want. Cheryl's on her way—well, there aren't any grandparents—but let her go."

But it couldn't be that way, of course. Corvin, looking away, said, "I know that you never left your seat between the last two stops."

Both were taken off in the deputies' car and Corvin, after phoning to cancel the second bus, drove his remaining passengers, all sitting well forward, on toward their destinations.

Case closed and gone from the news, while Corvin still answered bus company questions, filled out forms, and got put onto this day run and that. But polite persistence finally got him his old night run back; and over coffee in his front booth at MountAire, he again watched his passengers straggle through the food line. Finally Janice joined him. With barely a how-are-you, he got right to: "So how did it all come out? I keep seeing that kid—"

Janice smiled. "Got to you, didn't it?"

"Though I suppose way out here, you wouldn't have heard—"

"I work out here but I live in town," Janice said. "I got into the hearings. Cheryl got what used to be called reform school; her mother, Sally Leffert, got prison—accessory, conspiracy, impairing the morals—she'd put sleeping tablets into that guy's coffee at your previous stop. As to that fat guy, ten pounds lighter and unbuttoning his shirt to show everybody, he's already back through here checking on his franchises."

"But what was it all about? Nothing was taken. The guy still had his watch and ring."

"And roll of bills. Sally got to tell her whole story, the few feeble objections overruled, and this goes way back to her as a teenager, her parents killed by a hit-and-run driver, and a goodlooking, dark-haired man showing up talking appraisal and scaring her about inheritance taxes. He keeps coming back, offering to 'fix things' and making a play and he gets her pregnant. They marry, he gets her to sign over her little farm to 'save it' and next thing he's gone and a couple show up with a deed to the place."

"And she's out?"

"Out. Plus her missing person report matches one from another 'wife.' Sally gets put into a home for unwed mothers

but later she and another teenage mother get supermarket jobs, different shifts, and pool incomes for an apartment. Their kids start school. The other girl marries and moves away, but Sally can now even start saving for a house. Enter Mr. Leffert to offer love, company, and fathering for the girl. Sally marries him. He needs a loan to buy a filling station—"

"Don't tell me," Corvin said. "He takes off with Sally's savings. She's not very good at picking men."

"Who's picking? Anyway, then comes this newspaper and TV picture of a car hanging from a bridge and the name, address, and picture of the drunk-driver cause of it—our stabbed guy—fat, less hair, but same name."

"The guy that showed up at Sally's farm and stole it? This kid, Cheryl's father?"

"The same. But Cheryl never knew him, remember, and justice is how they saw it. Rightly or wrongly, Sally blamed him not just for desertion and stealing her property but for everything else bad that followed. Mothers and daughters on their own are more like sisters, and they probably figured that a juvenile, if caught, could get off. Anyway, it was the account of this guy's *previous* drunk-driving accidents that brought Sally to asking for the first time how

come this stranger turned up right after her parents' funeral."

"You mean this guy also was the hit-and-run driver who killed Sally Leffert's parents?"

"What matters is that Sally and Cheryl became sure. They bought bus tickets to New York—and that newspaper—but drove to this man's town, located and followed him, and, when he boarded your bus, got on too with their through tickets. Sally counted on him not recognizing her after fifteen years." Corvin sipped his coffee, but it was cold. "So the kid's in reform school, the mother's in jail, and this guy's out free to hit on some other woman or crash into somebody else's car."

"Once he gets his license back," Janice agreed. "However, Cheryl could get a new, better start and Sally's prison's not bad. I had to visit it once. Besides, when the judge sentencing her asked if she had anything to say, she said, 'Yes. I'm

glad. I'm tired. Now, at last, I can stop trying.'"

"She could get early parole."

"Probably will," Janice assured him, "and Cheryl back. And the friend who'd shared the apartment came. Her husband's very successful and she stands ready to sponsor them when the time comes."

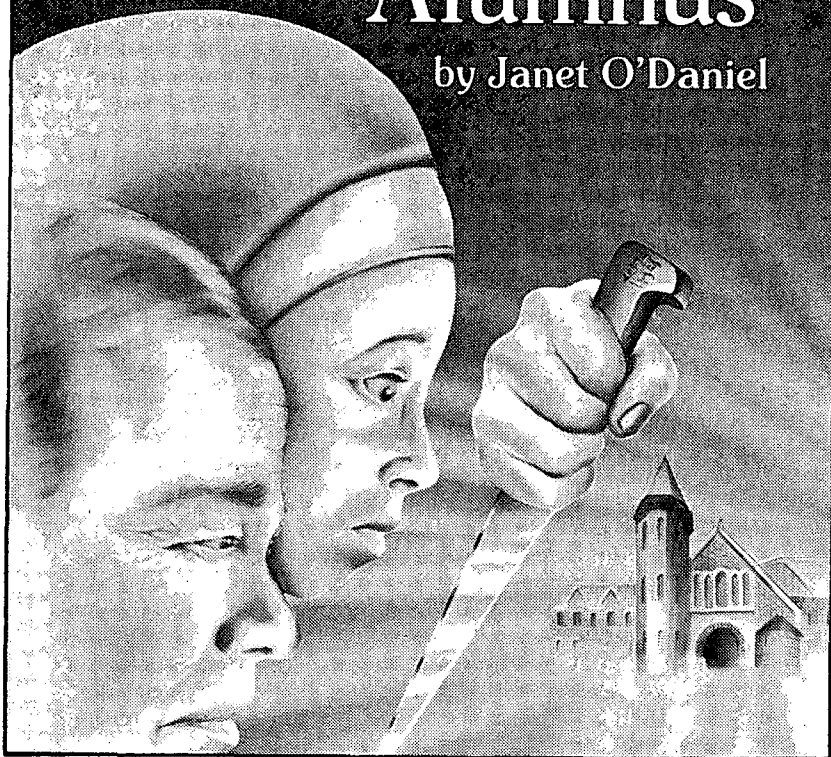
Corvin pushed away his cold coffee. "I *know* the victim was that fat guy. But still it gets me that *he's* out running around getting rich off his franchises."

When Janice smiled this time, Corvin noticed it and how it changed her, or maybe she'd changed her hair.

She said, "Well, it's not much consolation but I understand he's got loans on those places and payments to make. A lot of us around here, *most* of us, are finding new places to buy hamburgers or new likings for pizza and fried chicken, and people around here don't forget and the stories go from town to town."

Death of an Alumnus

by Janet O'Daniel



Sister Maureen had been on the go all day, dashing between buildings with her short veil flying, checking off items on a list, seeing to the seating arrangement on the stage of the audi-

torium. A big crowd was expected for the dedication of the new building there on the grounds of St. Margaret's Home. Monsignor Griffin, Father Dunne, Mr. Hewitt from the bank that held the mortgage.

Illustration by Halina Malicka

And then of course Mrs. Frazer from the Altar Guild and Mr. Allen from the K of C. Both had been active in fund-raising for the building. A good many "graduates" would be coming, too. Boys and girls—but of course they were men and women now—who had been the orphaned and the homeless when St. Margaret's took them in. A really hectic day, but wonderful, too, Sister Maureen reflected. "Who would have thought it would end the way it did?" Sister Brigid said, only that was much later.

Sister Brigid had brought soup to her office late in the day with the early autumn dusk drawing in and had scolded her for overdoing. "You're wearing yourself out, sister. And I'm sure you skipped lunch. Now take your shoes off for a minute and close your eyes. Feel that lovely new carpet under your feet. Oh, I do *love* this room."

"Much too grand," Sister Maureen said. "Carpet indeed."

"Nonsense. The director should have a nice office."

Sister Maureen waved this away. "What about the flowers? Has Roger brought the chrysanthemums from the greenhouse? I wanted twelve pots on the stage."

"All taken care of, sister. Now drink the soup."

"Was he agreeable about it?"

Sister Maureen picked up the spoon.

"Oh, well, you know Roger. He doesn't like it when anybody but you tells him to do anything. But I said it was *for* you, and he seemed to get the idea."

Sister Maureen nodded and took a swallow of soup. Roger Mulligan, who had the mind of a child, had lived at the home for so many years that all of them had forgotten how he arrived and where he came from. Roger's talent for gardening went far beyond mere greenness of thumb. He lived and breathed along with the living and breathing of his plants, understanding them in a way that Sister Maureen found bewildering. God's gift, of course, she thought now. The door that opened when another one closed.

She glanced up at Sister Brigid, who stood there with her arms folded, obviously not planning to budge one inch in the matter of the soup. There was a good deal of Attila the Hun in Sister Brigid, she decided. Sister Maureen sighed and drank the soup.

"Very good," Sister Brigid said, a parent rewarding a tractable child. "Now I'll show your visitor in."

"Oh no—" Sister Maureen looked distressed. "I have so many things still to do. I really think I should save all my vis-

iting for after the dedication ceremonies."

"You won't want to save this one," Sister Brigid said with a small, mysterious smile, and went to the door.

The young man who came in was so tall that he ducked in the doorway. A boyish grin opened his face wide. "Hi, coach."

"Eddie!" Sister Maureen was up from her chair in a flash and flying around the desk. The young man seized her and lifted her off the floor in a huge hug. "I was so hoping you'd come!" she said.

"You didn't think I'd miss it, did you?"

"I know how busy you are. I was watching you on television last night."

He gave a groan. "Not my best game—"

"Well, maybe not. They can't all be best. But at least you pulled it out in overtime."

"Just trying to do what you always taught me, sister. Keep both feet on the floor and fake them out. Hey, you know something—all the time I was here I never asked you how you knew so much about basketball?"

"Five brothers, all over six feet."

"But what about now? No more teaching? No more coaching? This is some office—are

you really the new head man around here?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. And we're getting quite grand. We have two coaches now. Sister Veronica—she works with the girls, and Mr. Byrne, a lay worker, he's the boys' coach."

"Bet they're not up to your style."

"Oh, they're very good—"

"I remember your pins. You always had a lot of big safety pins around you to pin up your skirts and your veil when you were showing us how to make jump shots."

"Well, never mind that. Now tell me if you're getting offers. I heard you were. From the pros."

"Well, some."

"Of course. You were bound to. But you're not making any quick decisions, I hope."

"No—"

"Good. Because the money probably sounds tempting. But you should get your degree first. You still want to be a lawyer, don't you?"

"Oh, sure. And I'm going to be."

"That's all right then." Studying his face—blue eyes, slightly uptilted nose—she was sure he was telling the truth. Eddie Bristow had always had a transparent face. It was one of the things that endeared him to her and had, right from that

first day when his older brother Francis had brought him to St. Margaret's and he had stood there, clinging to Francis's hand, nose running, eyes wide, trying hard not to cry. "It's not that I don't want him, sister," Francis had said. "But with both our folks gone now—and I'm in construction, see. I move around a lot. As soon as I get settled, I'll be glad to have him. If you could just keep him here for a few months—" In the actual event it had been eight years, all the years of his growing up, and Sister Maureen had tried not to fault Francis, who she was sure had meant well.

She gave him another look and wondered whether it was her imagination or whether some shade of uneasiness was clouding those wide-open blue eyes.

"Is everything all right with you, Eddie?" she asked gently. "I mean—" A thought lurched into her head, alarming her. "You haven't had anything to do with drugs, have you? So many athletes you hear about—"

"No. Lord, no. Not my style, sister. I'm fine. Hey, you know who I was thinking about? Old Roger. How's he doing? Still in his greenhouse?"

A little too deliberate a change of subject, Sister Maureen thought, but she answered,

"Same as ever. And yes, still there. Why don't we stop over and see him before the program? Roger always liked you." Eddie had never teased and tormented him as some of the others had, that was why.

"Can you spare the time? Who's on the program, by the way? The monsignor, I bet. Trot out that speech of his about the golden opportunities of youth?"

She gave him a poke. "I'll take the time. And don't get wise. Yes, the monsignor. Also Mr. Hewitt from the bank."

"Oh, boy. His are always about the cards being stacked against you and the odds being long—"

"You're dreadful. Now look, maybe I'll introduce you from the audience. You wouldn't mind that, would you? I mean, we don't have that many illustrious alumni to point to." Seeing his frown she assured him, "You won't have to make a speech, you know. Just stand up and wave. Like a prizefighter."

"All right. I'll do it for you, sister." He grinned down at her. Sister Maureen remembered those two front teeth, one always toeing out slightly in front of the other.

"It's so good to see you, Eddie." She put a hand on his arm as they started out the door. "Speaking of illustrious alumni, I thought I saw Artie

Hoffman when I was crossing the lawn earlier."

Something went tense in his arm. She felt it through the tweed of his jacket. "Artie Hoffman—"

"Yes. Last one I'd have expected to show up today. That is—of course I think kindly of all our boys and girls, only Artie *was* one of the difficult ones."

"A creep."

"Now, now. Charity, Eddie. Only it did puzzle me a bit, seeing him, because I'd been thinking he was—away."

"In the slammer. He was. For illegal gambling. He's been out for a while, though."

"Oh. Well, that explains it. Now let's go see Roger. We'll catch up on all the news later."

It was not quite dark, but a little wind had started up, blowing leaves across their path. Sister Maureen felt a small chill. Autumn, of course. One had to expect it. They left the old brick administration building and started across the lawn toward the greenhouse. Far beyond stretched the fifty acres of St. Margaret's with its residence cottages, convent, chapel, school building, barn. And as a centerpiece now the big new all-purpose building, dominating everything. Once the place had been a farm, and even now the spreading-out of the city into suburbs had not quite

reached it. Sister Maureen glanced up at the tall figure striding along beside her, remembering times when a small Eddie had tagged along at her heels with his rapid-fire questions and young enthusiasms. She thought about rewards and how great they could be sometimes. More than she deserved, certainly, but she would try to accept them humbly and be grateful.

Soft, moist warmth greeted them as they pushed open the door of the greenhouse. They walked down an aisle surrounded by trembling green leaves and extravagant blooms. Pale pink cyclamen, bronze chrysanthemums, African daisies. At the end of the aisle Roger Mulligan, in work shirt and jeans that were carefully folded up six inches, stood at a potting table planting freesia bulbs in light soil. He moved his head from side to side as he worked, humming in a low tuneless drone. His plaid shirt was slightly pulled out over his jeans in back. He was putting on weight, Sister Maureen thought. Too many of the sisters slipped him goodies on the sly. She would have to speak to them.

"Roger, look who's here," she said. She reached up and pushed a strand of hair back from his forehead. One or two gray hairs

there, she noticed with surprise. She still thought of him as one of the children—they all did. "Do you remember Eddie? He used to be a friend of yours."

Roger gave him a sideways look, tucking his chin in shyly and then wagging his head even more rapidly from side to side.

"Hi, Roger." Eddie Bristow stuck out his hand. Roger regarded it warily for a moment, then took it in his own hand, which had a fair amount of potting soil clinging to it. He smiled the trusting smile which had always melted Sister Maureen's heart.

"Eddie's come to the program, Roger. The one in the auditorium where you sent the flowers."

"Mums," Roger said. "I sent mums."

"You're doing a good job, Roger," Eddie said. "Everything looks first-rate around here."

Roger's head wagged harder than ever.

"May I have a couple of pots of those African daisies, too?" Sister Maureen asked. "I know everyone will admire them."

"Okay."

"Will you walk along with us and bring them?"

"Okay."

Roger led the way and started out the door with a flowerpot in each hand, but then stopped so

short that Eddie and Sister Maureen nearly bumped into him.

"What is it, Roger old man?" Eddie asked, and then both of them saw someone walking across the lawn away from the greenhouse. Someone looking in? Sister Maureen wondered. One of the guests doing a bit of sightseeing? She felt the autumn chill again. The figure turned toward them, a thin outline in the dusk. Plaid jacket, wingtip shoes, a cigarette in one hand. While they watched he spun the cigarette away in a bright arc, then stood there dimly silhouetted, the night wind blowing leaves around his feet. But now familiar. Sister Maureen peered into the shadows. "Artie Hoffman? Is that you? Hello, Artie."

"Hi, sister." He lifted one finger to his forehead in a little salute. "Just looking the old place over."

"So glad you came. It's almost time for the program."

"See you there," he said, and walked away from them.

Roger stood in the doorway, looking anxious.

"Come along, Roger. We'll walk with you. No one's going to bother you," Sister Maureen said.

"I don't like him," Roger said quite clearly.

Of course he wouldn't, she

thought. Artie had always been one of his tormentors when they were younger. "Come on. Eddie and I will be with you." Roger edged along slowly, and Sister Maureen turned to glance up at Eddie Bristow. His expression indicated quite clearly that he didn't like Artie Hoffman either. Currents, Sister Maureen thought. Those childhood currents that ran underneath everything and never quite disappeared.

"Come on, you two," she said firmly, as if they were both sixth-graders.

She helped Roger place the daisies on the stage of the brightly lighted, paint-smelling auditorium, then turned to Eddie.

"We've about fifteen minutes before the program starts. Go ahead and look around if you want to. The cafeteria's through that door, kitchen beyond. Upstairs is the library. Study rooms. Over that way—" she pointed—"is the new gym and swimming pool. They're on the other side of the building. Only don't be late getting back. Oh—there's the monsignor—got to run."

"Come on, Roger, let's beat it," Eddie said, and Roger, grinning and wagging, followed him out.

After that, everyone arrived

at once as they were bound to do, Sister Maureen thought. Monsignor Griffin first, along with Father Dunne. She hurried over to greet them. They were a study in contrasts, the monsignor tall and magisterial—but really he was very kindhearted, Sister Maureen reminded herself—it was just that he looked so *imposing* in his long cassock. His gray hair was brushed back to make a leonine frame for distinguished, gaunt features. Father Dunne, St. Margaret's own priest, was short and round-faced, his hair thinning. The bulbous tips of his shoes turned upward.

"This is your day, sister," Monsignor Griffin said, smiling at her. "We owe it all to your tenacity."

She hoped not too many people would say that to her—she would be in mortal danger of succumbing to vanity.

"Not at all, monsignor," she insisted. "Everyone contributed so much. And of course it was God's help more than anything that saw it through."

"We all acknowledge that," the monsignor smiled. "But you are certainly St. Margaret's staunchest champion."

"We all acknowledge that, too, don't we?" someone said close to her ear, and Sister Maureen turned to see Mr.

Hewitt from the bank, gray-haired, solid — but natty, too, in his navy blazer and french cuffs—the lights catching on the metal frames of his glasses. She had lost track of how many hours she had spent in his office at the bank going over figures.

"Oh, Mr. Hewitt, how good of you to come. And we're looking forward to a few words from you. I know you won't mind that — you're very good at thinking on your feet." Out of the corner of her eye she could see the fifth-graders who were going to sing. They were wiggling like a nest of eels at one side of the auditorium. And where was Sister Angela, who was to play the piano? Sister Maureen had an inspiration. "Father Dunne, why don't you take Monsignor and Mr. Hewitt on a little tour before the program starts? Fifteen minutes — no more now. You're all to be on the stage, of course." She herded them off and turned to be confronted by Mrs. Frazer from the Altar Guild, who had wafted heavily into the auditorium on a cloud of Emeraude.

"Sister Maureen, how absolutely wonderful everything looks. Now do put me right to work, I'm at your disposal."

"Mrs. Frazer! I knew we could count on you." Uncharitably, Sister Maureen wished Mrs. Frazer had not chosen this mo-

ment to "help." Things were confused enough. Inspiration struck. "Perhaps you might see if the tables are set up for the refreshments later. In the cafeteria?"

"Oh, by all means, sister." Mrs. Frazer bustled off, weighty with importance, and Sister Maureen offered up a small prayer that Sister Brigid, who was in charge of refreshments and an impeccable organizer, would forgive her.

The auditorium was starting to fill up. People were making their way in in ones and twos and groups. She recognized most of those who had once been residents at St. Margaret's — familiar faces which she had known as child faces, and in most cases the thing that had been there then was still present, only refined or sharpened or thrown into a new focus. But still there. What was central remained. Now they were adults and drawn back here by some curious mix of nostalgia and — what? Affection, she hoped. Of course, remembrance was bound to be a mixed bag of pain and happiness. But perhaps today they were remembering the good parts.

Things got under way at last, and only twenty minutes behind schedule. She saw Eddie re-

turn to the auditorium and take a seat in the back. She tried to catch his eye; she would have liked him somewhere in the middle, since she planned to introduce him. Perversely, he refused to catch her signal. Then Father Dunne returned, shepherding the monsignor.

"Splendid, sister. Splendid," the monsignor said as he took his seat on the platform. "Golden opportunities for the young people in every room."

"That is *quite* a swimming pool," Mr. Hewitt said admiringly, strolling in after them. "And the exercise equipment! I assure you, some of my friends wouldn't mind spending a lunch hour there."

"All in order," Mrs. Frazer said in loud bell tones. "And such sweet centerpieces on the tables—"

"Wonderful," Sister Maureen said, and got up to stand at the podium.

"Friends—" she said a little shakily. "We're so happy to see you all here today." The noisy hum of talk faded to silence. Feet shuffled, throats were cleared, and the program got under way.

It was when the fifth-graders were singing that she caught sight of Sister Brigid, all the way in the back. She had pushed the auditorium door open cautiously and now she stood there

looking toward the stage, her face white and terrified.

Quietly Sister Maureen left the stage by the side steps and walked up the aisle to the back. She could feel eyes on her. "For amber waves of grain," the fifth-graders sang doggedly.

"What is it, sister?" she whispered, and Sister Brigid shook her head wordlessly and lifted a hand to the door. Sister Maureen followed her out into the corridor.

"What's wrong?"

"Out in the back. By the back entrance," Sister Brigid said in a faint, tight voice.

The body lay in the autumn-brown tulip bed that had been newly planted near the door. Brightly illuminated by outdoor spotlights, the soft, friable earth was trampled, and several of the little yellow marking sticks were knocked about. Queen of Bartigon, Sister Maureen read. Holland Beauty. She made herself look at the plaid sports jacket, the wingtip shoes. At the contorted face, the dead, staring eyes. And at the Japanese weeding knife, black and wicked-looking, sticking out of Artie Hoffman's chest. She crossed herself.

"Sister, go get somebody," she said. Her voice had a far-away sound in her own ears. "Sheriff Burke's in there, I saw

107
And tell Father
dear, the monsi-
Well, do your best."

Brigid hurried inside
neone else slipped out the
Sister Maureen looked up.
h, Eddie—"

"I saw you leave." But he was
looking past her, at the body.
"Artie Hoffman."

She nodded. "Oh, Eddie, who
would do such a thing—" She
stopped, suddenly cold with fear.
"Eddie, go over to the green-
house and find Roger. Stay with
him until I can get there."

He stared at her. "Roger! You
certainly don't think he did
this. He'd never hurt anybody."

"No, I'm sure he wouldn't. I'm
sure of it. Only—" She hesi-
tated and looked back toward
the body. "That's Roger's knife."

She heard him swear softly,
under his breath, and then
without another word set off at
a loping run. He would be gentle
with Roger; she knew she could
count on him. But what good
was gentleness if Roger really
had done it? What would they
do to him? Lock him away in
some dreadful institution?

The door crashed open again.
Sheriff Burke, with one of his
uniformed men who had been
helping to keep an eye on traffic
and parking. Father Dunne, his
round face pale, his thinning
hair standing up around it, was
right behind them. Monsignor

Griffin stood in the doorway,
his handsome head framed
against the indoor light. Father
Dunne took an involuntary step
toward the body and Sheriff
Burke said sharply, "Stay back.
Everyone. And keep everyone
inside for now. I'll have ques-
tions to ask." He surveyed the
scene, the sprawled body, the
trampled earth now blood-
soaked. Someone—she realized
it was Mr. Hewitt—helped Sis-
ter Maureen to her feet.

"Whose knife is that?" the
sheriff asked.

In Sister Maureen's office
the little group sat uneasily.
Sheriff Burke paced. He was
wearing a suit today instead
of the flannel shirt and cordu-
roy trousers Sister Maureen
was used to. "We'll have to wait
and see what the M.E. says, but
it must have been only an hour
or so ago. You'd think someone
would have seen something."

"Everyone was inside for the
program," Sister Maureen said.

"Not everyone, obviously," the
sheriff said. She noticed he had
loosened his tie, but he still
looked uncomfortable in the
suit. "Hoffman was apparently
hanging around out there.
Maybe he was waiting to see
someone."

"Here?" Sister Maureen's eyes
were wide.

The sheriff did not answer.

He swung around to face Eddie Bristow. "You said that fellow Roger was with you."

"He was, yes. That is, we left the auditorium together. He went back to the greenhouse."

"Know that for a fact?"

"I saw him start across the lawn toward it. Yes, I'm sure that's where he went."

"After the sisters here found the body, you went there looking for him. How come you did that?"

"I told him to," Sister Maureen said quickly. "I was—we all feel concern about Roger because he's not—like the rest."

"And besides, that was his knife, right?"

Sister Maureen dodged the question. "Where is he now?"

"He's there in the greenhouse. I've got Deputy Poole with him."

"Oh dear." Sister Maureen pressed her hands together. "I hope he doesn't frighten Roger. Of course, anyone could have picked up that knife, sheriff. Roger's always leaving tools around."

Mr. Hewitt, sitting next to her, said thoughtfully, "And that someone could have figured Roger would be blamed, only they wouldn't send him to prison because of the way he is."

"Oh, but that would be an awful thing to do," Sister Mau-

reen said. "To take advantage of a poor soul like Roger—"

"Murder itself is an awful thing," Father Dunne said gently, and Sister Maureen sat back guiltily, her hands in her lap.

"After you saw Roger leave for the greenhouse, Mr. Bristow, what did you do?" the sheriff asked.

"Took a short tour of the building—Sister thought I might be interested."

"Others were doing that, too?"

"Everybody was doing it—milling around, looking in the rooms."

"Did you talk to any of them? Any of those you saw?"

"I might have waved or nodded to one or two—faces that looked familiar. I didn't stop and talk to anybody."

"You must have known many of the people here today. You grew up here, didn't you?"

"Yes. But I knew the program was coming up in a few minutes. I figured I'd see people later, at the reception."

"They must have recognized you, though. St. Margaret's superstar," Sheriff Burke said with a chilly smile.

Eddie Bristow's face reddened.

"What do you think of the new facilities here?" the sheriff asked suddenly. "The gym and pool and all that."

Eddie stared at him, eyes narrowed. He shrugged. "Great."

"You looked that area over pretty carefully, did you?"

"Not carefully, just stuck my head in."

"Anybody there when you did that?"

"I didn't see anybody."

"Back door from the gym leads right out to where he was found. If you were planning to meet him there, that'd be the way to go, I should think."

"I wasn't planning to meet him."

Sheriff Burke pursed his lips, stuck both hands in his pants pockets. The pants themselves had worked down to just under a slight paunch.

The monsignor said, "What about those people waiting in the auditorium, sheriff?" His voice had a clear, authoritative ring. The sheriff might be in charge, but there could be no mistaking whose bailiwick this was.

"I'll want to talk to them — some of them anyway. Monsignor, would you go and speak to them? Explain—well, the best you can, and ask them to be patient for a few minutes more?"

Monsignor Griffin's handsome head dipped in a brief nod and he went out. The sheriff turned back to Eddie. "I saw you play against State last night."

Sister Maureen frowned. Basketball? At a time like this?

"Had me worried there for a while when it went into overtime, but you managed to pull it out." Eddie said nothing. "Just lucky?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Or maybe something else? Artie Hoffman was a gambler. Gamblers have gotten to college athletes before, haven't they? Maybe Artie approached you, offered you money to hold the point spread down. Then he could have reneged, backed out of the deal—"

"Sheriff Burke, what a thing to say!" Sister Maureen flared. "Eddie would never do something dishonest. He grew up here at St. Margaret's. I'm the one who taught him basketball. I know him."

Sheriff Burke turned to her. "All due respect, sister, but we don't always know people as well as we think we do. And, of course, Artie Hoffman grew up here, too, didn't he? Now what about this Roger fellow? He's retarded, you say."

"He is, yes. But he's the gentlest soul—I mean, he cares for the greenhouse and does the planting, and he'd never hurt anyone."

"You know him, too, I take it." The polite irony was not lost on Sister Maureen.

"I feel that I do, yes," she said, struggling mightily to

maintain a respectful tone.
"Did he know Artie Hoffman?"

"Yes, he knew him."

"They weren't friends."

"Not—really."

"Enemies?"

"Goodness, Roger doesn't have enemies."

"He liked Hoffman then."

Sister Maureen squeezed her hands together. "No, he didn't really like him. He was kind of—afraid of him. That's another reason why he'd never have gone near him. Artie Hoffman used to tease him—some of the children did that, thoughtlessly."

"He might not have gone near him intentionally, but if he happened to run into Hoffman, and if he happened to have that knife with him, it might have given him courage."

Sister Maureen shook her head firmly but said nothing.

The sheriff turned back to Eddie. "I heard there was pretty heavy betting on that game with State."

Eddie shrugged.

"Artie Hoffman did approach you, didn't he?"

Sister Maureen opened her mouth to speak but then snapped it shut. She glanced at Eddie. There were two spots of color in his cheeks.

"Yes."

Sister Maureen gasped. The

sheriff's eyebrows went up and his mouth twitched slightly. If he were a cat he'd be purring, Sister Maureen thought angrily. "That certainly doesn't mean—" she began, but no one was listening.

"How much did he offer?" the sheriff asked.

Eddie hesitated. "Five thousand dollars. As you say, there was heavy betting on the game."

"And the money looked pretty good to you."

"No!"

"All you had to do was keep the point spread down—which you managed pretty neatly — only maybe Artie went back on his word, weaseled out of paying. And when you saw him here tonight you figured you'd threaten him, or put some muscle on him—"

"No! I never did any of that. Because I never made a deal with him. I told him to go to hell. Whether you believe it or not, I played the best I could last night."

Sister Maureen was looking from one to the other, thinking hard, thinking back.

"He was always a penny ante sort of person," she said.

"Who?" Sheriff Burke turned to her.

"Artie Hoffman. I was just remembering what he was like when he was here with us at St. Margaret's. He used to pay the little boys a penny to find him

discarded bottles. Then he'd return them for the nickel. You know, things like that."

"Yes, I'm sure he was, sister—"

"I think fondly of all our boys and girls, of course, only Artie was always—enterprising. And as I say, penny ante. Small time. I can't imagine him ever offering five thousand dollars to anyone."

"Even if he stood to make a lot more?"

"Even then. It wasn't in his makeup. Of course, someone else might have been behind him. Maybe he was only a go-between. And maybe that other person was the one he quarreled with." The room had gone silent. Sister Maureen said, "Sister Brigid, do you suppose you could scout out some coffee for us? I think we all need—" She paused at the sight of Sister Brigid's long, plain face, still pale with shock but now staring in horror at the floor. Sister Maureen followed the look and so did Sheriff Burke and Eddie Bristow. Father Dunne cleared his throat uncomfortably. Mr. Hewitt shifted in his chair and looked down. A smear of black dirt was grinding itself into the pale beige carpet under his feet. Some of it still clung to his shoes, and a faint earth smell came with it.

"My my," he said. "I seem to have—"

Sister Maureen said thoughtfully, "Nobody has planting soil like Roger's. He keeps his own compost heap. And he'd just done the tulip bed. All that fresh dirt."

Mr. Hewitt's face began to look mottled. "Now wait a minute. What's going on here?"

"People want a banker to be above reproach, don't they?" Sister Maureen said. "I mean—rather like one of us. Artie was only a messenger, but he could have been holding you up for a bigger cut, couldn't he? And threatening to let everyone know just how much of a gambler you really were? Father Dunne, Mr. Hewitt didn't stay with you and Monsignor when you went on your little sight-seeing tour, did he?"

"Monsignor was interested in the library," the little priest said worriedly. "Mr. Hewitt wanted to take a look at the facilities on the first floor. The pool, the gymnasium—"

"And returned to the auditorium at the last minute. In fact, everyone else was seated by that time, weren't they?" she added, almost apologetically. She gave the banker a scrutinizing look. "You've changed your jacket, Mr. Hewitt. Where's that lovely blue blazer you were wearing?"

"Now wait a minute," Mr. Hewitt said. "Now just wait a minute here."

"That one's rather wrinkled. Is it one you keep in your car—for emergencies, perhaps? Or did your wife remind you to drop it off at the dry cleaner's and you forgot? I imagine your other one would have got blood on it—"

"Look here," Mr. Hewitt said.

"And so careless of Roger to leave his weeding knife out that way."

"I think we'd better talk this over," Sheriff Burke said.

“**W**as it just the dirt on the carpet? And that business about the jacket?” Sister Brigid had found Sister Maureen on her hands and knees early the next morning, smoothing the tulip bed at the back of the new building. The grounds were quiet, the air clear and autumn bright. Sister Maureen's veil was slightly askew, her hands black with the soft dirt.

"I wanted to straighten this out before Roger noticed," she explained, sticking a Holland Beauty marker back in place. "I may be mixing these up some, but I don't think he'll be

too upset. I suspect he had them a little mixed up himself." She shaded her eyes with one hand and looked up at Sister Brigid. "No—or only partly those things. Earlier Eddie'd made fun of all the speeches we were going to hear—you know he was always a wicked mimic that way. And he remembered how Mr. Hewitt's were usually about changing the odds and about the cards being stacked against you, all that kind of thing."

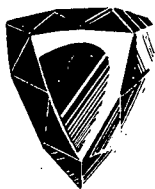
"Gambling talk," Sister Brigid said sagely.

"Of course it didn't mean anything—it was just in fun, only it stuck in my mind, you see, even though I scolded Eddie. And there wasn't any other way his shoes could have picked up all that dirt, was there? The sheriff kept everybody back, even Father Dunne, didn't he?"

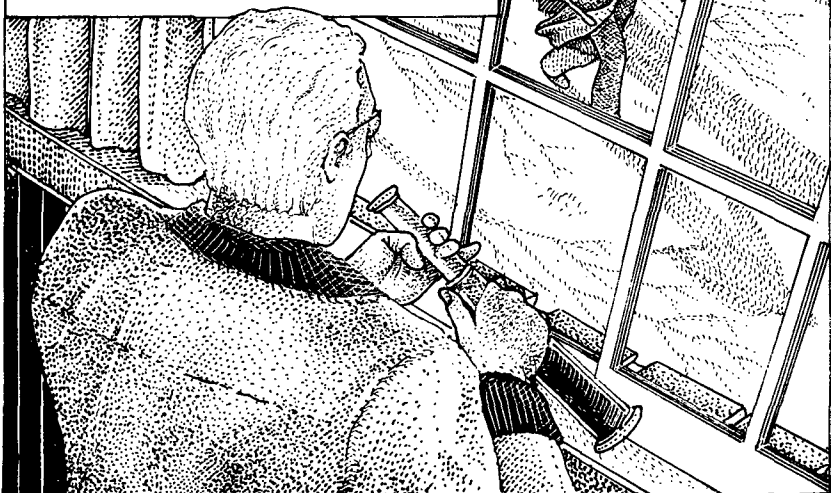
Sister Brigid shook her head sadly. "I've been brushing your carpet," she said.

"Well." Sister Maureen sat back on her heels and smiled a rueful, one-sided smile. "Both of us down on our knees. I think after yesterday that's fairly appropriate, don't you, sister?"

MYSTERY CLASSIC



The Great Valdez Sapphire



I know more about it than anyone else in the world, its present owner not excepted. I can give its whole history, from the Cingalese who found it, the Spanish adventurer who stole it, the cardinal who bought it, the pope who graciously accepted it, the favored son of the church who received it, the gay and giddy duchess who pawned it, down to the eminent prelate who now holds it in trust as a family heirloom.

It will occupy a chapter to itself in my forthcoming work on *Historic Stones*, where full details of its weight, size, color, and value may be found. At present I am going to relate an incident in its history which, for obvious reasons, will not be published—which, in fact, I trust the reader will consider related in strict confidence.

I had never seen the stone itself when I began to write about it, and it was not till one evening last spring, while staying with my nephew, Sir Thomas Acton, that I came within measurable distance of it. A dinner party was impending, and, at my instigation, the Bishop of Northchurch and Miss Panton, his daughter and heiress, were among the invited guests.

The dinner was a particularly good one, I remember that distinctly. In fact, I felt myself partly responsible for it, having engaged the new cook—a talented young Italian, pupil of the admirable old chef at my club. We had gone over the menu carefully together, with a result refreshing in its novelty, but not so daring as to disturb the minds of the innocent country guests who were bidden thereon.

The first spoonful of soup was reassuring, and I looked to the end of the table to exchange a congratulatory glance with Leta. What was amiss? No response. Her pretty face was flushed, her smile constrained, she was talking with quite unnecessary *empressement* to her neighbor, Sir Harry Landor, though Leta is one of those few women who understand the importance of letting a man settle down tranquilly and with an undisturbed mind to the business of dining, allowing no topic of serious interest to come on before the *relevés*, and reserving mere conversational brilliancy for the *entremets*.

Guests all right? No disappointments? I had gone through the list with her, selecting just the right people to be asked to meet the Landors, our new neighbors. Not a mere cumbrous county gathering, nor yet a showy imported party from town, but a skillful blending of both. Had anything happened already? I had been late

"The Great Valdez Sapphire," by an anonymous author, is reprinted from *Mystery and Detective Stories*: English/Irish, published in 1908 by The Review of Reviews Company, New York

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for dinner and missed the arrivals in the drawing room. It was Leta's fault. She has got into a way of coming into my room and putting the last touches to my toilet. I let her, for I am doubtful of myself nowadays after many years' dependence on the best of valets. Her taste is generally beyond dispute, but today she had indulged in a feminine vagary that provoked me and made me late for dinner.

"Are you going to wear your sapphire, Uncle Paul!" she cried in a tone of dismay. "Oh, why not the ruby?"

"You *would* have your way about the table decorations," I gently reminded her. "With that service of Crown Derby *repoussé* and orchids, the ruby would look absolutely barbaric. Now if you would have had the Limoges set, white candles, and a yellow silk center—"

"Oh, but—I'm so disappointed—I wanted the bishop to see your ruby—or one of your engraved gems—"

"My dear, it is on the bishop's account I put this on. You know his daughter is heiress of the great Valdez sapphire—"

"Of course she is, and when he has the charge of a stone three times as big as yours, what's the use of wearing it? The ruby, dear Uncle Paul, *please!*"

She was desperately in earnest I could see, and considering the obligations which I am supposed to be under to her and Tom, it was but a little matter to yield, but it involved a good deal of extra trouble. Studs, sleeve-links, watch-guard, all carefully selected to go with the sapphire, had to be changed, the emerald which I chose as a compromise requiring more florid accompaniments of a deeper tone of gold; and the dinner hour struck as I replaced my jewel case, the one relic left me of a once handsome fortune, in my fire-proof safe.

The emerald looked very well that evening, however. I kept my eyes upon it for comfort when Miss Panton proved trying.

She was a lean, yellow, dictatorial young person with no conversation. I spoke of her father's celebrated sapphires. "*My sapphires,*" she amended sourly; "though I am legally debarred from making any profitable use of them." She furthermore informed me that she viewed them as useless gauds, which ought to be disposed of for the benefit of the heathen. I gave the subject up, and while she discoursed of the work of the Blue Ribbon Army among the Bosjesmans I tried to understand a certain dislocation in the arrangement of the table. Surely we were more or less in number

than we should be? Opposite side all right. Who was extra on ours? I leaned forward. Lady Landor on one side of Tom, on the other who? I caught glimpses of plumes pink and green nodding over a dinner plate, and beneath them a pink nose in a green visage with nutcracker chin altogether unknown to me. A sharp gray eye shot a sideways glance down the table and caught me peeping, and I retreated, having only marked in addition two clawlike hands, with pointed ruffles and a mass of brilliant rings, making good play with a knife and fork. Who was she? At intervals a high acid voice could be heard addressing Tom, and a laugh that made me shudder; it had the quality of the scream of a bird of prey or the yell of a jackal. I had heard that sort of laugh before, and it always made me feel like a defenseless rabbit.

Every time it sounded I saw Leta's fan flutter more furiously and her manner grow more nervously animated. Poor dear girl! I never in all my recollection wished a dinner at an end so earnestly so as to assure her of my support and sympathy, though without the faintest conception why either should be required.

The ices at last. A menu card folded in two was laid beside me. I read it unobserved. "Keep the B. from joining us in the drawing room." The B.? The bishop, of course. With pleasure. But why? And how? *That's* the question, never mind "why." Could I lure him into the library—the billiard room—the conservatory? I doubted it, and I doubted still more what I should do with him when I got him there.

The bishop is a grand and stately ecclesiastic of the medieval type, broad-chested, deep-voiced, martial of bearing. I could picture him charging mace in hand at the head of his vassals, or delivering over a dissenter of the period to the rack and thumbscrew, but not pottering among rare editions, tall copies, and Grolier bindings, nor condescending to a quiet cigar among the tree ferns and orchids. Leta must and should be obeyed, I swore, nevertheless, even if I were driven to lock the door in the fearless old fashion of a bygone day, and declare I'd shoot any man who left while a drop remained in the bottles.

The ladies were rising. The lady at the head of the line smirked and nodded her pink plumes coquettishly at Tom, while her hawk's eyes roved keen and predatory over us all. She stopped suddenly, creating a block and confusion.

"Ah, the dear bishop! *You* there, and I never saw you! You must come and have a nice long chat presently. Bye-bye—!" She shook

her fan at him over my shoulder and tripped off. Leta, passing me last, gave me a look of profound despair.

"Lady Carwicket!" somebody exclaimed. "I couldn't believe my eyes."

"Thought she was dead or in penal servitude. Never should have expected to see her *here*," said someone else behind me confidentially.

"What Carwicket? Not the mother of the Carwicket who—"

"Just so. The Carwicket who—" Tom assented with a shrug. "We needn't go further, as she's my guest. Just my luck. I met them at Buxton, thought them uncommonly good company—in fact, Carwicket laid me under a great obligation about a horse I was nearly let in for buying—and gave them a general invitation here, as one does, you know. Never expected her to turn up with her luggage this afternoon just before dinner, to stay a week, or a fortnight if Carwicket can join her." A groan of sympathy ran round the table. "It can't be helped. I've told you this just to show that I shouldn't have asked you here to meet this sort of people of my own free will; but, as it is, please say no more about them." The subject was not dropped by any means, and I took care that it should not be. At our end of the table one story after another went buzzing round—*sotto voce*, out of deference to Tom—but perfectly audible.

"Carwicket? Ah, yes. Mixed up in that Rawlings divorce case, wasn't he? A bad lot. Turned out of the Dragoon Guards for cheating at cards, or picking pockets, or something—remember the row at the Cerulean Club? Scandalous exposure—and that forged letter business—oh, that was the mother—prosecution hushed up somehow. Ought to be serving her fourteen years—and that business of poor Farrars, the banker—got hold of some of his secrets and blackmailed him till he blew his brains out—"

It was so exciting that I clean forgot the bishop, till a low gasp at my elbow startled me. He was lying back in his chair, his mighty shaven jowl a ghastly white, his fierce imperious eyebrows drooping limp over his fishlike eyes, his splendid figure shrunk and contracted. He was trying with a shaken hand to pour out wine. The decanter clattered against the glass and the wine spilled on the cloth.

"I'm afraid you find the room too warm. Shall we go into the library?"

He rose hastily and followed me like a lamb.

He recovered himself once we got into the hall, and affably rejected all my proffers of brandy and soda—medical advice—everything else my limited experience could suggest. He only demanded his carriage “directly” and that Miss Panton should be summoned forthwith.

I made the best use I could of the time left me.

“I’m uncommonly sorry you do not feel equal to staying a little longer, my lord. I counted on showing you my few trifles of precious stones, the salvage from the wreck of my possessions. Nothing in comparison with your own collection.”

The bishop clasped his hand over his heart. His breath came short and quick.

“A return of that dizziness,” he explained with a faint smile. “You are thinking of the Valdez sapphire, are you not? Some day,” he went on with forced composure, “I may have the pleasure of showing it to you. It is at my banker’s just now.”

Miss Panton’s steps were heard in the hall. “You are well known as a connoisseur, Mr. Acton,” he went on hurriedly. “Is your collection valuable? If so, *keep it safe; don’t trust a ring off your hand, or the key of your jewel case out of your pocket till the house is clear again.*” The words rushed from his lips in an impetuous whisper, he gave me a meaning glance, and departed with his daughter. I went back to the drawing room, my head swimming with bewilderment.

“What! The dear bishop gone!” screamed Lady Carwitchet from the central ottoman where she sat, surrounded by most of the gentlemen, all apparently well entertained by her conversation. “And I wanted to talk over old times with him so badly. His poor wife was my greatest friend. Mira Montanaro, daughter of the great banker, you know. It’s not possible that that miserable little prig is my poor Mira’s girl. The heiress of all the Montanaros in a black lace gown worn twopence! When I think of her mother’s beauty and her toilets! Does she ever wear the sapphires? Has anyone ever seen her in them? Eleven large stones in a lovely antique setting, and the great Valdez sapphire—worth thousands and thousands—for the pendant.” No one replied. “I wanted to get a rise out of the bishop tonight. It used to make him so mad when I wore this.”

She fumbled among the laces of her throat, and clawed out a pendant that hung to a velvet band around her neck. I fairly gasped when she removed her hand. A sapphire of irregular shape flashed

out its blue lightning on us. Such a stone! A true, rich, cornflower blue even by that wretched artificial light, with soft velvety depths of color and dazzling clearness of tint in its lights and shades—a stone to remember! I stretched out my hand involuntarily, but Lady Carwichee drew back with a coquettish squeal. “No! no! You mustn’t look any closer. Tell me what you think of it now. Isn’t it pretty?”

“Superb!” was all I could ejaculate, staring at the azure splendor of that miraculous jewel in a sort of trance.

She gave a shrill cackling laugh of mockery.

“The great Mr. Acton taken in by a bit of Palais Royal gimcrackery! What an advertisement for Bogaerts et Cie! They are perfect artists in frauds. Don’t you remember their stand at the first Paris Exhibition? They had imitations there of every celebrated stone; but I never expected anything made by man could delude Mr. Acton, never!” And she went off into another mocking cackle, and all the idiots round her haw-hawed knowingly, as if they had seen the joke all along. I was too bewildered to reply, which was on the whole lucky. “I suppose I mustn’t tell why I came to give quite a big sum in francs for this?” she went on, tapping her closed lips with her closed fan, and cocking her eye at us like a parrot wanting to be coaxed to talk. “It’s a queer story.”

I didn’t want to hear her anecdote, especially as I saw she wanted to tell it. What I *did* want was to see that pendant again. She had thrust it back among her laces, only the loop which held it to the velvet being visible. It was set with three small sapphires, and even from a distance I clearly made them out to be imitations, and poor ones. I felt a queer thrill of self-mistrust. Was the large stone no better? Could I, even for an instant, have been dazzled by a sham, and a sham of that quality? The events of the evening had flurried and confused me. I wished to think them over in quiet. I would go to bed.

My rooms at the manor are the best in the house. Leta will have it so. I must explain their position for a reason to be understood later. My bedroom is in the southeast angle of the house; it opens on one side into a sitting room in the east corridor, the rest of which is taken up by the suite of rooms occupied by Tom and Leta; and on the other side into my bathroom, the first room in the south corridor, where the principal guest chambers are, to one of which it was originally the dressing room. Passing this room I noticed a couple of housemaids preparing it for the night, and discovered

with a shiver that Lady Carwitchet was to be my next door neighbor. It gave me a turn.

The bishop's strange warning must have unnerved me. I was perfectly safe from her ladyship. The disused door into her room was locked, and the key safe on the housekeeper's bunch. It was also undiscoverable on her side, the recess in which it stood being completely filled by a large wardrobe. On my side hung a thick soundproof *portière*. Nevertheless, I resolved not to use that room while she inhabited the next one. I removed my possessions, fastened the door of communication with my bedroom, and dragged a heavy ottoman across it.

Then I stowed away my emerald in my strongbox. It is built into the wall of my sitting room, and masked by the lower part of an old carved oak bureau. I put away even the rings I wore habitually, keeping out only an inferior cat's-eye for workaday wear. I had just made all safe when Leta tapped at the door and came in to wish me good night. She looked flushed and harassed and ready to cry. "Uncle Paul," she began, "I want you to go up to town at once, and stay away till I send for you."

"My dear—!" I was too amazed to expostulate.

"We've got a—a pestilence among us," she declared, her foot tapping the ground angrily, "and the least we can do is to go into quarantine. Oh, I'm so sorry and so ashamed! The poor bishop! I'll take good care that no one else shall meet that woman here. You did your best for me, Uncle Paul, and managed admirably, but it was all no use. I hoped against hope that what between the dusk of the drawing room before dinner, and being put at opposite ends of the table, we might get through without a meeting—"

"But, my dear, explain. Why shouldn't the bishop and Lady Carwitchet meet? Why is it worse for him than anyone else?"

"Why? I thought everybody had heard of that dreadful wife of his who nearly broke his heart. If he married her for her money it served him right, but Lady Landor says she was very handsome and really in love with him at first. Then Lady Carwitchet got hold of her and led her into all sorts of mischief. She left her husband—he was only a rector with a country living in those days—and went to live in town, got into a horrid fast set, and made herself notorious. You *must* have heard of her."

"I heard of her sapphires, my dear. But I was in Brazil at the time."

"I wish you had been at home. You might have found her out."

She was furious because her husband refused to let her wear the great Valdez sapphire. It had been in the Montanaro family for some generations, and her father settled it first on her and then on her little girl—the bishop being trustee. He felt obliged to take away the little girl, and send her off to be brought up by some old aunts in the country, and he locked up the sapphire. Lady Carwicket tells as a splendid joke how they got the copy made in Paris, and it did just as well for the people to stare at. No wonder the bishop hates the very name of the stone.”

“How long will she stay here?” I asked dismally.

“Till Lord Carwicket can come and escort her to Paris to visit some American friends. Goodness knows when that will be! Do go up to town, Uncle Paul!”

I refused indignantly. The very least I could do was to stand by my poor young relatives in their troubles and help them through. I did so. I wore that inferior cat’s eye for six weeks!

It is a time I cannot think of even now without a shudder. The more I saw of that terrible woman the more I detested her, and we saw a great deal of her. Leta kept her word, and neither accepted nor gave invitations all that time. We were cut off from all society but that of old General Fairford, who would go anywhere and meet anyone to get a rubber after dinner; the doctor, a sporting widower; and the Duberlys, a giddy, rather rackets young couple who had taken the Dower House for a year. Lady Carwicket seemed perfectly content. She reveled in the soft living and good fare of the Manor House, the drives in Leta’s big barouche, and Domenico’s dinners, as one to whom short commons were not unknown. She had a hungry way of grabbing and grasping at everything she could—the shillings she won at whist, the best fruit at dessert, the postage stamps in the library inkstand—that was infinitely suggestive. Sometimes I could have pitied her, she was so greedy, so spiteful, so friendless. She always made me think of some wicked old pirate putting into a peaceful port to provision and repair his battered old hulk, obliged to live on friendly terms with the natives, but his piratical old nostrils asniff for plunder and his piratical old soul longing to be off marauding once more. When would that be? Not till the arrival in Paris of her distinguished American friends of whom we heard a great deal. “Charming people, the Bokums of Chicago, the American branch of the English Beauchamps, you know!” They seemed to be taking an unconscionable time to get there. She would have insisted on being driven over to Northchurch

to call at the palace, but that the bishop was understood to be holding confirmations at the other end of the diocese.

I was alone in the house one afternoon sitting by my window, toying with the key of my safe, and wondering whether I dare treat myself to a peep at my treasures, when a suspicious movement in the park below caught my attention. A black figure certainly dodged from behind one tree to the next, and then into the shadow of the park paling instead of keeping to the footpath. It looked queer. I caught up my field glass and marked him at one point where he was bound to come into the open for a few steps. He crossed the strip of turf with giant strides and got into cover again, but not quick enough to prevent me recognizing him. It was—great heavens!—the bishop! In a soft hat pulled over his forehead, with a long cloak and a big stick, he looked like a poacher.

Guided by some mysterious instinct, I hurried to meet him. I opened the conservatory door, and in he rushed like a hunted rabbit. Without explanation I led him up the wide staircase to my room, where he dropped into a chair and wiped his face.

"You are astonished, Mr. Acton," he panted. "I will explain directly. Thanks." He tossed the glass of brandy I had poured out without waiting for the qualifying soda, and looked better.

"I am in serious trouble. You can help me. I've had a shock today—a grievous shock." He stopped and tried to pull himself together. "I must trust you implicitly, Mr. Acton, I have no choice. Tell me what you think of this." He drew a case from his breast pocket and opened it. "I promised you should see the Valdez sapphire. Look there!"

The Valdez sapphire! A great big shining lump of blue crystal—flawless and of perfect color—that was all. I took it up, breathed on it, drew out my magnifier, looked at it in one light and another. What was wrong with it? I could not say. Nine experts out of ten would undoubtedly have pronounced the stone genuine. I, by virtue of some mysterious instinct that has hitherto always guided me aright, was the unlucky tenth. I looked at the bishop. His eyes met mine. There was no need of spoken word between us.

"Has Lady Carwitchet shown you her sapphire?" was his most unexpected question. "She has? Now, Mr. Acton, on your honor as a connoisseur and a gentleman, which of the two is the Valdez?"

"Not this one." I could say naught else.

"You were my last hope." He broke off, and dropped his face on his folded arms with a groan that shook the table on which he

rested, while I stood dismayed at myself for having let so hasty a judgment escape me. He lifted a ghastly countenance to me. "She vowed she would see me ruined and disgraced. I made her my enemy by crossing some of her schemes once, and she never forgives. She will keep her word. I shall appear before the world as a fraudulent trustee. I can neither produce the valuable confided to my charge nor make the loss good. I have only an incredible story to tell," he dropped his head and groaned again. "Who will believe me?"

"I will, for one."

"Ah, you? Yes, you know her. She took my wife from me, Mr. Acton. Heaven only knows what the hold was that she had over poor Mira. She encouraged her to set me at defiance and eventually to leave me. She was answerable for all the scandalous folly and extravagance of poor Mira's life in Paris—spare me the telling of the story. She left her at last to die alone and uncared for. I reached my wife to find her dying of a fever from which Lady Carwicket and her crew had fled. She was raving in delirium, and died without recognizing me. Some trouble she had been in which I must never know oppressed her. At the very last she roused from a long stupor and spoke to the nurse. 'Tell him to get the sapphire back—she stole it. She has robbed my child.' Those were her last words. The nurse understood no English, and treated them as wandering; but I heard them, and knew she was sane when she spoke."

"What did you do?"

"What could I? I saw Lady Carwicket, who laughed at me, and defied me to make her confess or disgorge. I took the pendant to more than one eminent jeweler on pretense of having the setting seen to, and all have examined and admired without giving a hint of there being anything wrong. I allowed a celebrated mineralogist to see it; he gave no sign—"

"Perhaps they are right and we are wrong."

"No, no. Listen. I heard of an old Dutchman celebrated for his imitations. I went to him, and he told me at once that he had been allowed by Montanaro to copy the Valdez—setting and all—for the Paris Exhibition. I showed him this; and he claimed it for his own work at once, and pointed out his private mark upon it. You must take your magnifier to find it; a Greek Beta. He also told me that he had sold it to Lady Carwicket more than a year ago."

"It is a terrible position."

"It is. My co-trustee died lately. I have never dared to have

another appointed. I am bound to hand over the sapphire to my daughter on her marriage, if her husband consents to take the name of Montanaro."

The bishop's face was ghastly pale, and the moisture started on his brow. I racked my brain for some word of comfort.

"Miss Panton may never marry."

"But she will!" he shouted. "That is the blow that has been dealt me today. My chaplain—actually, my chaplain—tells me that he is going out as a temperance missionary to equatorial Africa, and has the assurance to add that he believes my daughter is not indisposed to accompany him!" His consummating wrath acted as a momentary stimulant. He sat upright, his eyes flashing and his brow thunderous. I felt for that chaplain. Then he collapsed miserably. "The sapphires will have to be produced, identified, revalued. How shall I come out of it? Think of the disgrace, the ripping up of old scandals! Even if I were to compound with Lady Car-witchet, the sum she hinted at was too monstrous. She wants more than my money. Help me, Mr. Acton! For the sake of your own family interests, help me!"

"I beg your pardon—family interests? I don't understand."

"If my daughter is childless, her next of kin is poor Marmaduke Panton, who is dying at Cannes, not married, or likely to marry; and failing him, your nephew, Sir Thomas Acton, succeeds."

My nephew Tom! Leta, or Leta's baby, might come to be the possible inheritor of the great Valdez sapphire! The blood rushed to my head as I looked at the great shining swindle before me. "What diabolic jugglery was at work when the exchange was made?" I demanded fiercely.

"It must have been on the last occasion of her wearing the sapphires in London. I ought never to have let her out of my sight."

"You must put a stop to Miss Panton's marriage in the first place," I pronounced as autocratically as he could have done himself.

"Not to be thought of," he admitted helplessly. "Mira has my force of character. She knows her rights, and she will have her jewels. I want you to take charge of the—thing for me. If it's in the house she'll make me produce it. She'll inquire at the banker's. If *you* have it we can gain time, if but for a day or two." He broke off. Carriage wheels were crashing on the gravel outside. We looked at one another in consternation. Flight was imperative. I hurried him downstairs and out of the conservatory just as the doorbell

rang. I think we both lost our heads in the confusion. He shoved the case into my hands, and I pocketed it, without a thought of the awful responsibility I was incurring, and saw him disappear into the shelter of the friendly night.

When I think of what my feelings were that evening—of my murderous hatred of that smirking, jesting Jezebel who sat opposite me at dinner, my wrathful indignation at the thought of the poor little, expected heir defrauded ere his birth; of the crushing contempt I felt for myself and the bishop as a pair of witless idiots unable to see our way out of the dilemma; all this boiling and surging through my soul, I can only wonder—Domenico having given himself a holiday, and the kitchen maid doing her worst and wickedest—that gout or jaundice did not put an end to this story at once.

"Uncle Paul!" Leta was looking her sweetest when she tripped into my room next morning. "I've news for you. She," pointing a delicate forefinger in the direction of the corridor, "is going! Her Bokums have reached Paris at last, and sent for her to join them at the Grand Hotel."

I was thunderstruck. The longed-for deliverance had but come to remove hopelessly and forever out of my reach Lady Carwitchet and the great Valdez sapphire.

"Why, aren't you overjoyed? I am. We are going to celebrate the event by a dinner party. Tom's hospitable soul is vexed by the lack of entertainment we had provided her. We must ask the Brownleys some day or other, and they will be delighted to meet anything in the way of a ladyship, or such smart folks as the Duberly-Parkers. Then we may as well have the Blomfields, and air that awful modern Sèvres dessert service she gave us when we were married." I had no objection to make, and she went on, rubbing her soft cheek against my shoulder like the purring little cat she was: "Now I want you to do something to please me—and Mrs. Blomfield. She has set her heart on seeing your rubies, and though I know you hate her about as much as you do that Sèvres china—"

"What! Wear my rubies with that! I won't. I'll tell you what I will do, though. I've got some carbuncles as big as prize gooseberries, a whole set. Then you have only to put those Bohemian glass vases and candelabra on the table, and let your gardener do his worst with his great forced, scentless, vulgar blooms, and we shall all be in keeping." Leta pouted. An idea struck me. "Or I'll do as you wish, on one condition. You get Lady Carwitchet to wear

her big sapphire, and don't tell her I wish it."

I lived through the next few days as one in some evil dream. The sapphires, like twin spectres, haunted me day and night. Was ever man so tantalized? To hold the shadow and see the substance dangled temptingly within reach. The bishop made no sign of ridding me of my unwelcome charge, and the thought of what might happen in a case of burglary—fire—earthquake—made me start and tremble at all sorts of inopportune moments.

I kept faith with Leta, and reluctantly produced my beautiful rubies on the night of her dinner party. Emerging from my room I came full upon Lady Carwicket in the corridor. She was dressed for dinner, and at her throat I caught the blue gleam of the great sapphire. Leta had kept faith with me. I don't know what I stammered in reply to her ladyship's remarks; my whole soul was absorbed in the contemplation of the intoxicating loveliness of the gem. *That* a Palais Royal deception! Incredible! My fingers twitched, my breath came short and fierce with the lust of possession. She must have seen the covetous glare in my eyes. A look of gratified spiteful complacency overspread her features, as she swept on ahead and descended the stairs before me. I followed her to the drawing room door. She stopped suddenly, and murmuring something unintelligible hurried back again.

Everybody was assembled there that I expected to see, with an addition. Not a welcome one by the look on Tom's face. He stood on the hearthrug conversing with a great hulking, high-shouldered fellow, sallow-faced with a heavy mustache and drooping eyelids, from the corners of which flashed out a sudden suspicious look as I approached, which lighted up into a greedy one as it rested on my rubies, and seemed unaccountably familiar to me, till Lady Carwicket tripping past me exclaimed:

"He has come at last! My naughty, naughty boy! Mr. Acton, this is my son, Lord Carwicket!"

I broke off short in the midst of my polite acknowledgments to stare blankly at her. The sapphire was gone! A great gilt cross, with a Scotch pebble like an acid drop, was her sole decoration.

"I had to put my pendant away," she explained confidentially; "the clasp had got broken somehow." I didn't believe a word.

Lord Carwicket contributed little to the general entertainment at dinner, but fell into confidential talk with Mrs. Duberly-Parker. I caught a few unintelligible remarks across the table. They referred, I subsequently discovered, to the lady's little book on North-

church races, and I recollected that the Spring Meeting was on, and tomorrow "Cup Day." After dinner there was great talk about getting up a party to go on General Fairford's drag. Lady Carwitchet was in ecstasies and tried to coax me into joining. Leta declined positively. Tom accepted sulkily.

The look in Lord Carwitchet's eye returned to my mind as I locked up my rubies that night. It made him look so like his mother! I went round my fastenings with unusual care. Safe and closets and desk and doors, I tried them all. Coming at last to the bathroom, it opened at once. It was the housemaid's doing. She had evidently taken advantage of my having abandoned the room to give it "a thorough spring cleaning," and I anathematized her. The furniture was all piled together and veiled with sheets, the carpet and felt curtain were gone, there were new brooms about. As I peered around, a voice close at my ear made me jump—Lady Carwitchet's!

"I tell you I have nothing, not a penny! I shall have to borrow my train fare before I can leave this. They'll be glad enough to lend it."

Not only had the *portière* been removed, but the door behind it had been unlocked and left open for convenience of dusting behind the wardrobe. I might as well have been in the bedroom.

"Don't tell me," I recognized Carwitchet's growl. "You've not been here all this time for nothing. You've been collecting for a Kilburn cot or getting subscriptions for the distressed Irish landlords. I know you. Now I'm not going to see myself ruined for the want of a paltry hundred or so. I tell you the colt is a dead certainty. If I could have got a thousand or two on him last week, we might have ended our dog days millionaires. Hand over what you can. You've money's worth, if not money. Where's that sapphire you stole?"

"I didn't. I can show you the receipted bill. All I possess is honestly come by. What could you do with it, even if I gave it you? You couldn't sell it as the Valdez, and you can't get it cut up as you might if it were real."

"If it's only bogus, why are you always in such a flutter about it? I'll do something with it, never fear. Hand over."

"I can't. I haven't got it. I had to raise something on it before I left town."

"Will you swear it's not in that wardrobe? I dare say you will. I mean to see. Give me those keys."

I heard a struggle and a jingle, then the wardrobe door must

have been flung open, for a streak of light struck through a crack in the wood of the back. Creeping close and peeping through, I could see an awful sight. Lady Carwitchet in a flannel wrapper, minus hair, teeth, complexion, pointing a skinny forefinger that quivered with rage at her son, who was out of the range of my vision.

"Stop that, and throw those keys down here directly, or I'll rouse the house. Sir Thomas is a magistrate, and will lock you up as soon as look at you." She clutched at the bell rope as she spoke. "I'll swear I'm in danger of my life from you and give you in charge. Yes, and when you're in prison I'll keep you there till you die. I've often thought I'd do it. How about the hotel robberies last summer at Cowes, eh? Mightn't the police be grateful for a hint or two? And how about—"

The keys fell with a crash on the bed, accompanied by some bad language in an apologetic tone, and the door slammed to. I crept trembling to bed.

This new and horrible complication of the situation filled me with dismay. Lord Carwitchet's wolfish glance at my rubies took a new meaning. They were safe enough, I believed—but the sapphire! If he disbelieved his mother, how long would she be able to keep it from his clutches? That she had some plot of her own of which the bishop would eventually be the victim I did not doubt, or why had she not made her bargain with him long ago? But supposing she took fright, lost her head, allowed her son to wrest the jewel from her, or gave consent to its being mutilated, divided! I lay in a cold perspiration till morning.

My terrors haunted me all day. They were with me at breakfast time when Lady Carwitchet, tripping in smiling, made a last attempt to induce me to accompany her and keep her "bad, bad boy" from getting among "those horrid betting men."

They haunted me through the long peaceful day with Leta and the *tête-à-tête* dinner, but they swarmed around and beset me sorest when, sitting alone over my sitting room fire, I listened for the return of the drag party. I read my newspaper and brewed myself some hot strong drink, but there comes a time of night when no fire can warm and no drink can cheer. The bishop's despairing face kept me company, and his troubles and the wrongs of the future heir took possession of me. Then the uncanny noises that make all old houses ghostly during the small hours began to make themselves heard. Muffled footsteps trod the corridor, stopping to listen

at every door, door latches gently clicked, boards creaked unreasonably, sounds of stealthy movements came from the locked-up bathroom. The welcome crash of wheels at last, and the sound of the front-door bell. I could hear Lady Carwitchet making her shrill *adieux* to her friends and her steps in the corridor. She was softly humming a little song as she approached. I heard her unlock her bedroom door before she entered—an odd thing to do. Tom came sleepily stumbling to his room later. I put my head out. "Where is Lord Carwitchet?"

"Haven't you seen him? He left us hours ago. Not come home, eh? Well, he's welcome to stay away. I don't want to see more of him." Tom's brow was dark and his voice surly. "I gave him to understand as much." Whatever had happened, Tom was evidently too disgusted to explain just then.

I went back to my fire unaccountably relieved, and brewed myself another and a stronger brew. It warmed me this time, but excited me foolishly. There must be some way out of the difficulty. I felt now as if I could almost see it if I gave my mind to it. Why—suppose—there might be no difficulty after all! The bishop was a nervous old gentleman. He might have been mistaken all through, Bogaerts might have been mistaken, I might—no. I could not have been mistaken—or I thought not. I fidgeted and fumed and argued with myself till I found I should have no peace of mind without a look at the stone in my possession, and I actually went to the safe and took the case out.

The sapphire certainly looked different by lamplight. I sat and stared, and all but overpersuaded my better judgment into giving it a verdict. Bogaert's mark—I suddenly remembered it. There, scratched upon the stone, was the Greek Beta! There came a tap on my door, and before I could answer, the handle turned softly and Lord Carwitchet stood before me. I whipped the case into my dressing gown pocket and stared at him. He was not pleasant to look at, especially at that time of night. He had a disheveled, desperate air, his voice was hoarse, his red-rimmed eyes wild.

"I beg your pardon," he began civilly enough. "I saw your light burning, and thought, as we go by the early train tomorrow, you might allow me to consult you now on a little business of my mother's." His eyes roved about the room. Was he trying to find the whereabouts of my safe? "You know a lot about precious stones, don't you?"

"So my friends are kind enough to say. Won't you sit down? I

have unluckily little chance of indulging the taste on my own account," was my cautious reply.

"But you've written a book about them, and know them when you see them, don't you? Now my mother has given me something, and would like you to give a guess at its value. Perhaps you can put me in the way of disposing of it?"

"I certainly can do so if it is worth anything. Is that it?" I was in a fever of excitement, for I guessed what was clutched in his palm. He held out to me the Valdez sapphire.

How it shone and sparkled like a great blue star! I made myself a deprecating smile as I took it from him, but how dare I call it false to its face? As well accuse the sun in heaven of being a cheap imitation. I faltered and prevaricated feebly. Where was my moral courage, and where was the good, honest, thumping lie that should have aided me? "I have the best authority for recognizing this as a very good copy of a famous stone in the possession of the Bishop of Northchurch." His scowl grew so black that I saw he believed me, and I went on more cheerily: "This was manufactured by Johannes Bogaerts—I can give you his address, and you can make inquiries yourself—by special permission of the then owner, the late Leone Montanaro."

"Hand it back!" he interrupted (his other remarks were outrageous, but satisfactory to hear); but I waved him off. I couldn't give it up. It fascinated me. I toyed with it, I caressed it. I made it display its different tones of color. I must see the two stones together. I must see it outshine its paltry rival. It was a whimsical frenzy that seized me—I can call it by no other name.

"Would you like to see the original? Curiously enough, I have it here. The bishop has left it in my charge."

The wolfish light flamed up in Carwicket's eyes as I drew forth the case. He laid the Valdez down on a sheet of paper, and I placed the other, still in its case, beside it. In that moment they looked identical, except for the little loop of sham stones, replaced by a plain gold band in the bishop's jewel. Carwicket leaned across the table eagerly, the table gave a lurch, the lamp tottered, crashed over, and we were left in semidarkness.

"Don't stir!" Carwicket shouted. "The paraffin is all over the place!" He seized my soft blanket, and flung it over the table while I stood helpless. "There, that's safe now. Have you candles on the chimney-piece? I've got matches."

He looked very white and excited as he lit up. "Might have been

an awkward job with all that burning paraffin running about," he said quite pleasantly. "I hope no real harm is done." I was lifting the rug with shaking hands. The two stones lay as I had placed them. No! I nearly dropped it back again. It was the stone in the case that had the loop with the three sham sapphires!

Carwitchet picked the other up hastily. "So you say this is rubbish?" he asked, his eyes sparkling wickedly, and an attempt at mortification in his tone.

"Utter rubbish!" I pronounced, with truth and decision, snapping up the case and pocketing it. "Lady Carwitchet must have known it."

"Ah, well, it's disappointing, isn't it? Good-bye, we shall not meet again."

I shook hands with him most cordially. "Good-bye, Lord Carwitchet. So glad to have met you and your mother. It has been a source of the *greatest* pleasure, I assure you."

I have never seen the Carwitchets since. The bishop drove over next day in rather better spirits. Miss Panton had refused the chaplain.

"It doesn't matter, my lord," I said to him heartily. "We've all been under some strange misconception. The stone in your possession is the veritable one. I could swear to that anywhere. The sapphire Lady Carwitchet wears is only an excellent imitation, and—I have seen it with my own eyes—is the one bearing Bogaerts's mark, the Greek Beta."

SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":

- 101: John and Nora Coleman, "African Safari"
- 103: Mike and Linda Austin, "Dracula's Castle"
- 105: Kevin and Kristi Bowers, "Ye Olde Graveyarde"
- 107: Nick and Joan English, "Invaders from Space"
- 109: Larry and Monica Drake, "The Ghost House"

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



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SARA PARETSKY

She's over thirty, uncompromisingly single, and rarely regretful that she has chosen being a private investigator as a career. Her home is Chicago, and she travels its freeways and neighborhood routes widely, rarely forced to consult a map. She runs in earnest, believing fitness is crucial to her job safety—and vital to the maintenance of her slim figure, for she has a weakness for junk food. She is V.I. Warshawski, christened Victoria Iphigenia, called "Vic" by her friends, and she starred most recently in *Blood Shot* (Dela-corte Press, \$17.95, 312 pp.), the fifth Sara Paretsky crime novel.

In *Killing Orders*, Vic is summoned to the home of her Aunt Rosa, a beastly old woman who

despised Vic's mother, the dead Gabriella, and has never had much use for Vic, either. But Gabriella made Vic promise to help Rosa if the old crone ever asked—and now she has. She's been dismissed from her post at a nearby Benedictine priory pending the conclusion of an FBI investigation into some missing bonds. Vic consults a college friend who is a successful stockbroker and who soon turns up dead. There seems to be no connection, other than the tenuous link of a fanatical Roman Catholic secret society.

Vic doesn't avoid the tough situations: she remains at the hospital bedside of an old man whom she'd involved in the adventure; she advertises for a meeting with a mob don; she taunts a phone voice threaten-

ing her with thrown acid (and acid is subsequently thrown). Like her protagonist, Paretsky fearlessly dives into subjects as backgrounds for her crime dramas that make her novels close to controversial: the Catholic church in *Killing Orders*, corruption in labor unions in *Indemnity Only*, abortion clinics in *Bitter Medicine*. In *Deadlock*, she goes down to the docks to look into the death of a cousin, while in *Blood Shot* she explores the world of corporate crime in the form of toxic dumping. Because Vic was trained as a lawyer, she is an ideal investigator for big business. Temperamentally she's a maverick, but she knows what her corporate clients are talking about. And the varied choice of milieu—the “problem” of each novel—is always instructive and usually surprising.

The adult situations, the use of violence, and probably Vic's own personality—she's a rogue, often irascible and aggressively independent—have had little appeal for fans of exclusively cozy mysteries. Yet many more crime fiction readers are touting Sara Paretsky for her well-developed plots, her thoroughly human and credible characters, and her sure hand at sustaining the suspense. Like so many readers, I appreciate Vic as her own special person. She is not

only tough; she's strong, and she's fiercely loyal. She has a sense of humor, albeit a very dry one. She spends little time judging others, and even less time worrying about their opinions of *her* lifestyle, although she became a P.I. because the word “justice” meant something to her and she wished to be able to help it along. She makes darn good company.

“At home I peeled off layers of shirts and leggings and soaked in a hot tub for a while. Being self-employed, I can hold my review of operations and management anywhere. This means time spent thinking in the bath is time spent working. Unfortunately, my accountant doesn't agree that this make my water bill and bath salts tax-deductible.

“My theory of detection resembles Julia Child's approach to cooking. Grab a lot of ingredients from the shelves, put them in a pot and stir, and see what happens. I'd stirred the pot at the priory, and at the FBI. Maybe it was time to let things simmer a bit and see if the smell of cooking gave me any new ideas.”

Don't try to tell me I just have a soft spot for any smart, sexy lady who can take care of herself on the streets of Chicago, but while she can barely keep her apartment clean enough to

meet minimum standards of civilization. V.I. Warshawski is a fresh addition to the first-person P.I. tradition, a woman with heart, head, and lots of

stamina, the creation of a first-rate novelist.

(You can read the first four Warshawski novels in Ballantine paperback editions.)

MYSTERY REVIEWS

A new scholar-feminist can join Kate Fansler on the mystery bookshelves. **A Masculine Ending** by Joan Smith (Scribners, \$15.95, 186 pp.) introduces Londoner Loretta Lawson, single again after an amicable breakup of her marriage to a journalist (who promises to be an ongoing character). Loretta has borrowed a Left Bank apartment from a friend who is traveling so that she can attend a Paris conference regarding the fate of a feminist magazine she helped found, deliver a paper on her position regarding the widespread use of masculine endings—and having saved money on a hotel, fly back to London early the next morning. The first night of her late arrival she's surprised to find a gentleman sleeping in the second bedroom. The second night, upon returning from her conference, she's even more surprised—by evidence that the sleeper has been murdered. Smith has created a no-nonsense, adult, intelligent amateur sleuth and given her a very plausible reason to investigate a murder. This is a fine, credible mystery with the appeal of an academic background.

London is also the setting for Audrey Peterson's **The Nocturne Murder** (Pocket Books, \$3.50, 253 pp.). Jane Winfield is an American graduate student, in London to study music and to research the British composer she's chosen as subject of her thesis. She slides agreeably into an affair with Max, a music critic much older than herself, never entering much into his private life with his grown children until Max is murdered, and Jane is arrested for the crime. This is well-written, with an appealing sleuthing duo (Jane is assisted by a young British solicitor), and a lot of music background.

Another female sleuth can be found in Carolyn Wheat's punchy mystery, **Where Nobody Dies** (Bantam, \$3.50, 225 pp.). Cass Jameson is a young Brooklyn attorney building up a practice from her recently-acquired brownstone. She had represented the hard-bitten Linda Ritchie through her divorce and the subsequent endless custody battles for their pre-teen daughter. To help out Linda and the child, Cass was renting her top floor apartment to the two.

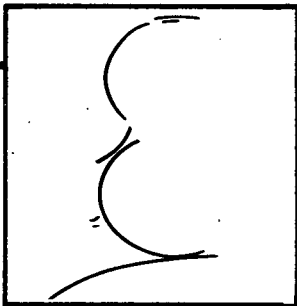
When Linda is found brutally stabbed in the flat, the investigation turns to the most likely suspect: Brad Ritchie, who had threatened his ex-wife as recently as their last court appearance, and had done so in front of lots of witnesses. Cass finds herself feeling responsible for the girl and incapable of believing Brad a murderer. Thus begins an investigation which will turn up more than a few long-buried secrets and will take Cass from the courthouse to the corridors of City Hall and the penthouse offices of a big-time real estate developer. Cass has smarts, energy, humor, and tenacity, plus the courage to walk some pretty mean, impoverished streets in New York.

The Man Who Died Laughing refers to a celebrated, near-has-been comedian named Sonny Day (and a wonderful character author David Handler has drawn!). Day wants to pen his memoirs, including the revelation of his famous fight with his one-time partner, a secret staunchly kept by both men all these years. The offer to ghost the book comes in to Hoagy, a literary light whose reputation is quickly dimming as he struggles to get out his second novel. This is a suspenseful character study, a compelling look into the lives of several fascinating people, as well as a gimlet-eyed peek into the private world of Hollywood. Hoagy and his dog Lulu are fresh and likable, and Sonny Day is downright mesmerizing; add Handler's light touch with humor and dialogue, and you have a mystery well worth reading. I recommend this one. (Bantam, \$3.50, 192 pp.)

Richard Rosen's latest Harvey Blissberg novel is **Saturday Night Dead** (Viking, \$16.95, 274 pp.), and it's thoroughly entertaining. Harvey is hired to locate and then bulldog a famous athlete who is scheduled to emcee a live TV variety show. (Comparisons to *Saturday Night Live* are inevitable, so I'll just mention it now and get it over with.) Just when his assignment has come to a close, the cast party concludes in murder, and Harvey is hired by the show to minimize the damage. Harvey, hero of *Strike Three, You're Dead*, brings sanity, common sense, and a great gift for humor to the situation, as always. But it's the situation—the personalities, the histories, the details of TV production—that make *Saturday Night Dead* so difficult to tune out. This deserves a hefty "market share" of mystery fans.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



Randall Adams is serving a life sentence in a Texas penitentiary because he murdered a Dallas cop—or did he? Filmmaker Errol Morris believes not, and **The Thin Blue Line** is his attempt to set right an injustice. The movie is based on the actual case of Randall Adams, who was convicted and sentenced to death in the 1976 murder of a Dallas policeman. Adams, whose death sentence was eventually commuted, remains in prison but maintains his innocence.

The murder of officer Robert Wood occurred on an unusually cold November night when a patrol car pulled a passenger car, traveling with its headlights off, to the side of the road. Officer Woods approached the driver's side of the car, was hit with five bullets, and was killed. His partner, officer Teresa

Turko, sipping a milkshake at the time, jumped from her car and fired at the fleeing vehicle. She was unable to remember a license plate number.

The story of a falsely accused man is one used many times by Alfred Hitchcock, notably in his 1957 film *The Wrong Man*, which was also based on a true story. It was the tale of Manny Balestrero, a New York musician, husband and father of two, who was arrested, jailed, and brought to trial for armed robbery. The actual perpetrator of the crime (eventually caught when he committed a similar holdup) turned out to be a virtual lookalike and Balestrero was set free.

Where Hitchcock was a storyteller in *The Wrong Man*, Morris is an advocate, a defense attorney for Adams in a big screen retrial. Morris goes over Adams' trial and, using inter-

views with those involved—witnesses, lawyers, judges, investigators, police, and the convict-defendant—tries to establish reasonable doubt, all that is needed in a criminal trial to find a defendant not guilty. Morris manages to get David Harris, the most likely suspect in the murder, to all but admit that Adams is innocent. Harris, answering the key question of Adams' innocence, says coyly, "I'm sure he is . . . because I'm the one that knows."

It was nearly a month after the shooting when Vidor, Texas, police picked up a sixteen-year-old David Harris who had reportedly been bragging to friends that he was the one who killed that Dallas cop. He even showed them to the murder weapon. Once in Dallas, however, he changed his story. He was in the car, he said, but in the passenger seat at the time of the murder. It was a hitchhiker he had picked up — Randall Adams—who had shot the cop. Adams denies this but does admit Harris picked him up hitching and that they spent the day riding around, drinking, smoking dope, and watching porno films at a drive-in.

As a defense attorney, Errol Morris does a credible job, managing to cast a reasonable doubt on Randall Adams's guilt. But as a filmmaker he does not fare

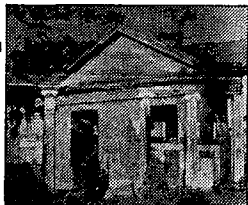
quite so well. Because we don't really get to know who Randall Adams is, it's hard to afford him much sympathy. Does he have a family? We're told he'd been staying with a brother at a Dallas motel after moving from Florida. What did he do in Florida? Randall Adams remains as much a mystery as anything else in *The Thin Blue Line*.

Cinematographically, Morris favors close-ups, slow motion, and repetition, achieving with these devices a surreal quality. The crime scene is reenacted more than a dozen times, from different angles, with different objects of focus—headlights, gunshots, milkshakes. . . .

But most of the job of establishing a reasonable doubt as to Adams's guilt is left to sometimes-tedious interviews which make the film look like a very long segment from television's *60 Minutes*, failing to hold the moviegoer's attention for the full hundred and one minutes. Had Morris devoted more screen time to his other methods of presentation and less to talking heads, *The Thin Blue Line* would have been much more arresting. Had he looked at *The Wrong Man* and made his movie in similar style, using a linear narrative to tell the story and using actors to act action, based on his interviews and research, the film would have been still better.

THE STORY THAT WON

The July Mysterious Photo-Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virgo to Don Shaffer of Bel-Herring of Westminster, of Detroit, Michigan; Carol Martha Gordon of New Olinghouse of Everett, Washington; Jon K. Evans of Sherman Oaks, California; Elizabeth Chater of Irvine, California; Jan Streilin of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; —and Marie Ingrisano of Floral Park, New York (see the Editor's Notes on page 3).



graph contest was won by ginia. Honorable mentions mont, California; A. B. Colorado; Mary Krzewinski Locke of Newton, Alabama; York, New York; Lane

MY OLD MAN by Art Cosing

Listen, my old man is a proud guy, and when I told him I couldn't use him on my next heist he took it hard.

Mind you, he's the finest box man in the business. There ain't no safe he can't blow. At seventy he can still handle explosives better than Boom Boom Corbett. But what I needed for this job was a second-story man. I told him.

"Admit it, Larry, you think I'm too old," he said. "Sure, I can't climb like I used to, but I can damn well get the job done."

The job I'd lined up was a honey. A quarter of a million dollars in jewels it was. The disgruntled butler at the Trumpfeller estate had tipped me, for a price: the whole Trumpfeller clan was leaving for Bermuda today.

The first floor windows and doors were barred and wired, but one window on the second floor, courtesy of the butler, would be open.

I was maybe five hundred feet from the empty Trumpfeller mansion when the dynamite went off. BLAM! Everything shook.

When my head cleared, I see the whole first floor of the mansion is gone. The second floor has dropped and is now resting on the lawn. And there's my old man, his hand still on the detonator.

"Son," he says, "you was right. Climbing ain't my strong suit, so I'm letting you and me in on the new ground floor."

I ask you, is my old man proud, or what?

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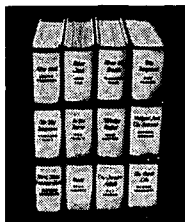
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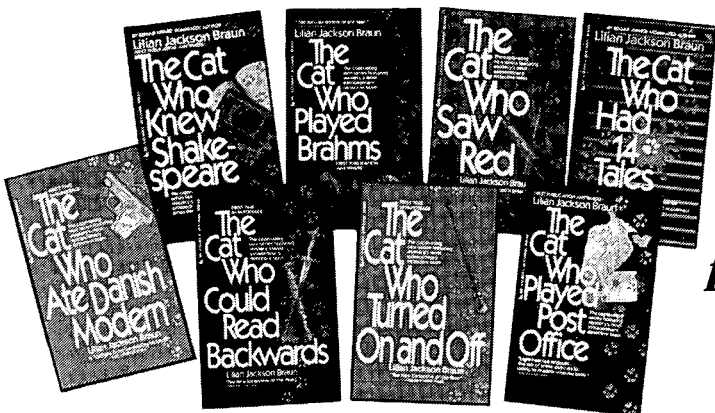
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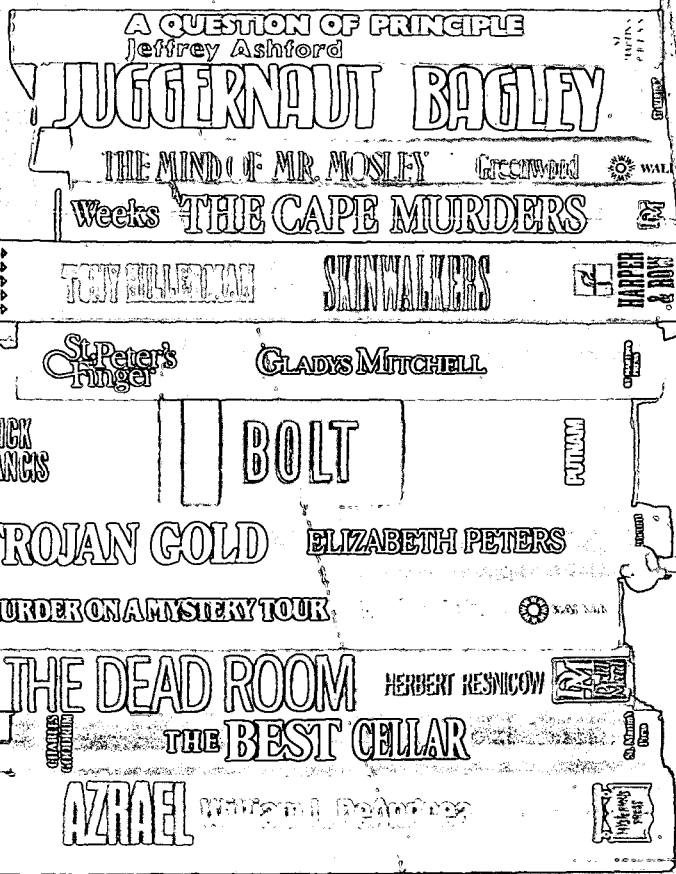
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